A LITERARY COMPANION

Ellen.

May 28th. 1893.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

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A Literary Courtship

UNDER THE AUSPICES OF PIKE'S PEAK

BY

Anna Fuller

'T is but the fancy of an idle hour,
Shut in betwixt the pages of a book.

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

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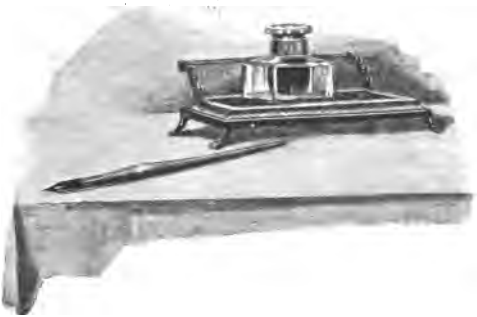


A LITERARY COURTSHIP.

I.

THE POW-WOW.

JOHN BRUNT was a lucky fellow—is still for the matter of that. Everybody knows his books; that capital volume of *Travels at the South Pole*, the two series of essays on *The Modern Wherewithal*, and his *Reign of Louis XI*, which all the historical bigwigs have sanctioned. From the outset, Brunt was blessed with that happiest of combinations, a moderate income and a taste for

literature. Now literature, as has been often observed, is a first-rate thing, if you have an income to back it up with, but for a poor devil out at elbows pecuniarily, like some of us, writing books is about as practical an occupation as keeping a yacht.

John was a great fellow for a discussion, and was never satisfied till he had proved his point. It is my opinion that if he had hazarded the statement that a fairly good pedestrian could walk from Maine to Oregon in so and so many weeks, he would have been ready to perform the feat for the sake of the argument. Luckily, that particular question never came up, for we should have missed John badly at the Pow-wow. Pretty good name for a debating club, by the way. Harry Flint christened it. Flint is a capital fellow, only he insists upon making puns, and his are so much better than anything anybody else can do in that line, that we find them rather a bore.

One night, at the Pow-wow, Hanley

had read a paper on *Civil-Service Reform*, and a very able paper it was too. But the discussion which was in order was inclined to flag, owing to our all being of pretty much the same opinion. Ellis tried to recall some heresy of Daniel Webster's on the subject, which he thought might stir us up a little, but there was n't any real "go" to the talk, and we drifted off onto side issues. Ballot reform, which is Manning's hobby, led to English methods of election, old and new, and then somebody struck *Felix Holt*, which naturally brought the talk round to George Eliot. One of the fellows remarked that it was odd that so many women had chosen a man's name for a *nom-de-plume*, but Percy Kent said it was natural enough, since a book got a better hearing if it was supposed to be written by a man.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Brunt. "A book 's a book, and stands for itself! If it 's a woman that 's written a good book, all the better for the book!"

"If that is so," Kent answered, "it is mighty queer that so many of the best heads among the women should have chosen to take a man's name."

"A man's name is a more effectual concealment," Blunt maintained.

"Then why don't men sometimes do the same thing for the sake of concealment? Why did n't Dickens call himself Ruth instead of Boz? Why did n't Samuel Clemens pass himself off as *Mary* Twain? Why were not the "Sonnets of Proteus" called the sonnets of Io or Persephone or some other classic girl, just as changeable, I warrant you, as Proteus ever was?"

"Because the author was not as muddled in his mythology as you are, Kent!"

"Poh! My mythology is miles ahead of your logic, Brunt. There 's a reason in things, and Currer Bell, and George Sand, and George Eliot knew what they were about—you may depend upon it!"

Singularly enough, we found this a much more fruitful theme than civil-ser-

vice reform, and there were lots of good things said before we got through with it. I don't repeat them, for two reasons. In the first place, I have noticed that what we fellows say at the Pow-wow never sounds as clever by half when you try to repeat it. In the second place, it all happened some time ago and I have forgotten the best points. But I remember that everybody had something to say on the subject. Brunt got much wrought up, because he could not lay his hand on any proof of his assertion, that it was rather an advantage to a book than otherwise, to have been written by a woman. If it had not been for a look in Brunt's eye that I knew better than anyone else—for Brunt and I are old college chums, and I know him like a book, though he would n't thank me for saying so—if it had n't been for that look in his eye I might have forgotten all about that particular Pow-wow.

II.

THE NOM-DE-PLUME.

JOHN was working like a tiger for the next six months or more, and we all wondered what he was at. But he hates to be pumped, and is always mighty close about his writing. We have an idea that he begins things and does not finish them. He is fastidious, and he does not turn out as much work as you would expect from the ease with which he seems to write.

One evening the following January I happened in on John, and found him sit-

ting in front of a fine old fire, smoking his pet pipe and clutching a very fat manuscript. Uncommonly cosey quarters he used to have. I never could see why a fellow like Brunt should want to get married and give up all the comforts of life. Things can never be the same again. It 's sure to spoil half the fun,—especially for your bachelor friends. In my mind, at least, women are always associated with swallow-tail coats and sweet wine, and expensive ash-trays on queer little legs, that break if you look at them.

Women are well enough, of course, in their place—within their limitations, as the wiseacres say. At balls, for instance, or at dinner parties, they are very good company. At a ball, especially, one would always wish to see them. It 's not much fun dancing with another fellow, even when he ties a handkerchief round his arm and dances "lady." But in a man's own house they always seem a little in the way.

To return to John and his den. It did

look pleasant there when I stepped in on that cold evening and found that great fire burning and the air fragrant with pipe smoke, and John, all by himself, hanging on to his manuscript as though he were afraid it might get away.

"Hullo, Jack," said I.

"Hullo, Dick," said he, with a pleased sort of grin. "You 're just the fellow I was wanting to see."

Now if there is anything that makes a man feel good it is that kind of a welcome. So different from the way a woman sticks out her hand, and says, "Very happy to see you, Mr. Dickson." Not that that is such a bad thing to hear either, only you know they will say it just the same whether they mean it or not.

Well, I saw that I had come in the nick of time. I knew by the way John clutched his manuscript that it was finished, and by the way he said "Hullo" that he meant to tell me all about it. So I sat down and lighted my pipe and waited for him to begin.

"Well, Dick, I 've finished my novel."

My real name, by the way, is Francis Dickson, though many people suppose it to be Richard from the fellows calling me Dick. Rather an annoying mistake, for I was named after my uncle the General, and not being distinguished myself, I am unwilling to lose any reflected glory. However, I was not so egotistical as to be thinking of that when John told me about his novel.

"Glad to hear it," said I, as though I had been in the secret all along. "What is it about?"

"Oh, all kinds of things."

"What is it called?"

"*Spoils.*"

"Good title! And with your name on the title-page it will go off like hot cakes."

"Ah! But that is just the point. My name is not to be on the title-page."

"Not on the title-page? What is the reason of that?"

"Well, in order to start fair without any preconceived ideas on the part of the

public, I don't propose to sell my novel on the strength of *Louis XI.* or *The South Pole.* I want the public to be unbiassed. Then besides," he added, after a pause, "I am going to try an experiment."

There was a look in his eye which suddenly reminded me of that talk at the Pow-wow. Was it possible that John had written a novel for the purpose of clinching an argument? Nothing could have been, after all, more in character. But I curbed my curiosity and amusement, and asked, innocently enough: "Have you chosen your *nom-de-plume?*"

"Yes, just about. I am going to use a woman's name."

"You don't say so! And what is the name?"

"Well, I have had several in mind. I should like to know what you think of—" here he fixed me with his eye, as though he had been taking aim, and said, with a lingering emphasis—"*Lilian Leslie Lamb*"?

I still kept my countenance, though with difficulty. There sat John, great strapping fellow, with his sunburnt face and sandy moustache, his strong, pronounced features and keen eyes, the typical camper-out and club man, and in his great deep bass voice he was proposing to call himself Lilian Leslie Lamb!

He, meanwhile, did not seem to see the humor of the thing.

"Lilian Leslie Lamb" he repeated, weighing the words with evident satisfaction. "It is striking, it is alliterative, and it is intensely feminine. Moreover, the name might perfectly well be genuine. I once knew a girl named Mary M Morse. I always had a notion that the middle initial stood for Morris. Mary Morris Morse! That is very much the same kind of name, only I think mine is prettier, don't you?"

This self-complacency was the finishing touch. I put my head back and roared, and then, all of a sudden, Jack seemed to see the joke, and he struck his knee and

roared too. I declare! We had n't had such a laugh since the day Old Hobbins forgot his wig.

Well, when we had got pretty well shaken up, we quieted down again, and talked the matter over soberly. That is, by spells. For every little while the absurdity of the thing would come over me and off I would go again. Brunt was good-natured about it, though he did n't always join in. First of all, he swore me to secrecy. He did not want any half-way work, he said. He was going to give his experiment a fair trial. He thought he had written a good novel; and that settled the question in my mind, for John was always harder to please than his readers. He said that if the book should be a failure or even a half success, he should be free to admit that it was owing to the woman's name. He proposed sending it to the Sandersons. Bates & Bramford knew his hand, which might betray his identity, and then he thought novels more in the Sandersons' line.

"What!" I cried. "You 're not even going to let your publishers into the secret? Supposing they reject it."

"Poh! Publishers are not such fools as people think. The Sandersons know a good thing when they see it, and that novel is a good one, I can tell you that to begin with."

He then gave me the outlines of the plot, which was a strong one, and we sat talking things over till nearly breakfast time. Jove! Those were good old times. I often wish them back.

III.

THE OTHER LILIAN.

THE Sandersons were ready enough to accept the novel, and it was not long before the proof-sheets were arriving at my office addressed to Miss Lilian Leslie Lamb, care of F. Dickson, Esq.

Everything went on swimmingly, and *Spoils* was published in time for the spring and summer trade. It made an enormous hit, as every one knows. There was a second edition out in no time, and the third and fourth were nearly simultaneous. It was republished in England,

and a handsome "consideration" remitted to the author.

Brunt was pleased, of course. Who could have helped being pleased? He was used to success, but not to this kind of success. His *Louis XI.* and his essays had given him an enviable reputation, but the public does not buy histories and essays by the bushel, and Brunt had never made such a brilliant dash at fame before.

And, after all, I do believe that what pleased John more than anything else was the fact that he had proved himself in the right. The woman's name had certainly not hindered the success of the book. He and I were both convinced that it had actually helped the sale. All the critics dwelt upon the remarkable power of the work, its "virile strength," its "incisive force," and they made haste to add that these qualities were tempered by "true feminine delicacy of feeling," and "nicety of perception." That was where John chuckled. He made a collection of all the reviews—a thing he had never taken

the trouble to do with his other books. In that whole collection there were only five notices which contained no allusion to feminine perception and delicacy. But he most of all prized those which declared that the characters were drawn with an "almost masculine power."

It was "nuts" to us, you may be sure. Yet I used to wonder that he could keep the secret. Glory is, after all, a thing a man is not likely to get too much of. But there was one thing that Brunt liked even better than glory, and that was, to prove his point.

"But you have proved your point now," I urged, when the newspapers were fairly crackling with praise. "Do let us tell the fellows at the Pow-wow, at least."

"Not yet," he answered, with quiet determination.

"Don't you mean ever to let them know?" I asked; for I was perfectly flabbergasted at his indifference.

"Oh, yes! Some time or other."

"But, great Scott! when?"

"Well," he answered, thoughtfully, "I shall wait for the twentieth edition, and then see how I feel."

I ought to have said before, that one of the most amusing features of the affair, in its early stages, was the letters which "Miss Lamb" received through her publishers. The Sandersons had been requested not to reveal the address of the new writer, by which means I was saved a good deal of bother. That is, The Sandersons forwarded the letters to my office, and no one else associated my name in the remotest degree with the famous authoress.

At first, as I said, the letters were immensely entertaining. No matter how commonplace or impertinent or high-flown they might be, they always served to heighten the humor of the situation. In fact the best of them—and there were some among them which any author might have been proud to receive—the best of them could hardly be so sensible or so well-conceived as to escape some striking

incongruity. At one time we got into such a chronic state of amusement that we grinned when we did n't mean to, and the fellows asked us "What 's the joke?"

One pouring rainy day Brunt came into my office, and instead of sitting down comfortably he went and drummed on the window pane, gazing down on the umbrellas below, as though they had been a garden of jacqueminot roses. I knew there was something to pay, so when I got tired of waiting I sang out: "Let 's have it, Johnny."

I wanted to call him Lilian at first, but he shut down on that. He had a notion I might forget myself. The fact is, he was afraid as a thief of being found out.

"Oh, it 's nothing at all," he said, coming over and sitting down in the chair I keep for my clients. I used to hate that chair, for after I had had it several years it looked as good as new. Even now it is in better repair than it ought to be. There are too many men practising law in New York.

Well, then Johnny pulled a letter out of his pocket, one I had sent around to him the evening before, and handing it to me, said: "Read that."

The hand was a lady's, and had the unusual advantage of being both stylish and legible. The letter was dated at Colorado Springs, and ran as follows:

"My Dear Miss Lamb:

"A glance at my signature may serve as a partial excuse for the liberty I am taking in writing to you. If it were not for the coincidence in our names, I should know better than to trouble you even with an expression of the very great pleasure which your novel has given me. For there must be literally thousands who have enjoyed that remarkable book, and it would be a poor return to you were we to besiege you with letters.

"Your name and mine, as you will observe, are identical, and my aunt, Mrs. Ellerton, who takes a special interest in genealogy, is convinced that you are a long-lost cousin. Aside from the natural pride we should have in such a connection, my aunt's hobby—I warned her that I should use the word—is strong enough to give the keenest zest to such an inquiry as she

bids me make, even were the bearer of our family name quite unknown to fame.

"To come to the point. My quite incalculably great grandfather came to America in 1625 and was one of the founders of the New Haven colony. His wife was Lilian Leslie, and the name has continued in the family in each succeeding generation. One of his descendants, our own ancestor, was an officer in the colonial army, and fell in an Indian skirmish; poor boy! He was barely twenty-one. His widow seems to have been too much engrossed with her one child to have fashed herself about family connections, whereby she unwittingly incurred the censure of posterity as represented in her very great granddaughter, my aunt. For, through her indifference to these vital matters, she appears quite to have lost track of her husband's only brother, William, whom my aunt persists in considering the founder of a collateral branch. This William, being at the time unmarried, removed to New York State, where he may, for aught we know, have fallen a victim to the Iroquois; though my aunt is unwilling to give him up. She is convinced that if New York were not such a large State, and if it did not harbor so many Lambs, and if those hitherto examined had not betrayed such astounding ignorance in the matter of genealogy, she would certainly

have discovered valuable cousins before this. As it is, her efforts have hitherto been fruitless, and I leave you to imagine her joy when she suddenly sees the possibility of success. A new Lamb of any description is always exhilarating, but a Lilian Leslie Lamb exceeds her fondest hopes.

"You will perhaps be interested to know what manner of people we are. I am happy in being able to assure you that we are extremely respectable, crime and abject poverty being alike unknown among us. The conventional black sheep has appeared occasionally within our fold and has been prayed over or disowned according to the temper of his immediate victims. As a family we run to the ministry, though one judge, a generation back, and a plucky young colonel, who was killed in the war of the Rebellion, form a picturesque variation. A less picturesque variation occurred in the person of my own father, who went into copper. As he spent most of his time in the West, and died when I was a child, I never saw much of him. Indeed I have no near relatives besides my aunt, and I am free to confess that I should value a new cousin highly. I ought to add, in view of your talents, that neither my aunt nor I boasts a shadow of one. In fact, we are very commonplace sort of people. After this admission will

you still investigate the case as far as may be perfectly convenient? I am assuming that you have not, up to this time, occupied yourself very much with family trees. And indeed it seems hardly possible that any one woman should have the taste and capacity for both genealogy and literature. My aunt, at least, has not.

"Are there, then, any traditions in your family which point to an ancestor migrating from New Haven to New York in the seventeenth century? Do you know how far back the Leslie in your name dates? Also, are Henrys and Williams prevalent in your family? My ancestor was a Henry. Have you any instances of dark hair with blue eyes? That combination has been frequent among us. And, oh! one thing more! You don't happen to know of a stray malachite ear-ring among your people? My aunt treasures a hideous one of pre-historic date, and fondly hopes to discover its mate in the New York branch. Though why William Lamb should have carried off an odd ear-ring, and one of such extraordinary ugliness, to boot, is not quite clear to my mind.

"I believe I am writing rather at random, for I cannot imagine your reading as far as this. But being under bonds to my aunt to tell the whole story, I could not, in conscience, make the letter shorter. I will offer no apologies, but

leave you to make due allowance for the effect of a famous name upon an obscure person. So many people have actually asked me whether I wrote *Spoils* that my respect for the judgment of my fellow-creatures has perceptibly fallen.

"I remain, dear Miss Lamb,

"Very sincerely,

"Your would-be cousin,

"LILIAN LESLIE LAMB."

"Well, Jack," I said when I had finished the perusal of this interesting communication, "what are you going to do about it?"

"That is just the question."

"You might keep up the correspondence."

"Francis Dickson, you ought to be ashamed of yourself," cried John, with so much warmth, that I was convinced that he had had the same idea himself, and that that was why he seemed so out of sorts. Brunt has always had the impulses of a Bohemian, together with the character of a gentleman, and they sometimes conflict.

I knew that nothing could entertain

him more than a correspondence such as he might perfectly well have carried on with this young lady, and no one ever the wiser, and it did seem such a pity to lose the fun, that I stood up for my suggestion with some spirit. It may be that, underlying my evil counsels, there was a confidence in John's invulnerability which caused the rôle of tempter to sit lightly upon my conscience. At any rate, I said, with that dignity with which, under certain circumstances, even a worm will turn: "I fail to see that I have said anything to be ashamed of, John Brunt, and I 'll thank you to treat my suggestions a little less cavalierly."

Then, thinking I had vindicated my claims to respect, I went on, more pleasantly: "Come, John, let us talk the thing over sensibly. Here is this young lady, evidently a clever, wide-awake person, stranded in that heathenish West of ours, with probably not the shadow of intellectual stimulus or congenial companionship."

As I talked, each statement that I made was so convincing to myself that I seemed to come rapidly into possession of facts on the subject hitherto unknown to me.

"I really don't suppose, John, that she has a being to speak to but that old crank of an aunt, with her family trees and malachite ear-rings."

"She has but one of the ear-rings, Dicky."

"Oh! she has got the other one on the brain, which amounts to the same thing," said I, for I had no idea of being so easily put down.

"Go ahead!" said John. "Go ahead! Only I can't help wondering where you learned so much about the family."

"My dear boy," I answered, quite condescendingly, "I am blessed with average intelligence—that is all. Now, here is this poor girl, without a single interest in life, utterly cut off from the great world which is teeming with—"

"Hold on!" cried John. "You seem

to forget that she has read *Spoils*. She can't starve on that."

"Yes, and evidently it has been an epoch in her life," I hastened to say. "Then think how much more inspiring would be a correspondence with the author of this Great Work." I found myself speaking in capital letters. But John did not seem particularly impressed.

"And so you would advise me to pass myself off for a woman in a correspondence with a young lady?"

"And why not? She is not likely to unbosom herself to a total stranger, man or woman. She won't talk of her private affairs in such letters. And, after all, when it comes to the point, you are a gentleman, a man of the world, and a great author. You will be giving her gold when she is looking for silver. There is no robbery in that."

Anybody else would have been rather struck by my metaphor. I was myself. But, bless you, Brunt does n't care anything about metaphors. He can reel them

off by the yard. Why, in his essay on "Small Change" in the *Wherewithal Series*, they 're as thick as spatters. The very title is a metaphor, and he does not make any more of them than a carpenter does of shavings.

I talked on in this strain for some time, till at last John burst out with a fine display of impatience.

"Don't talk bosh any more, Dick. I 'm going to write my answer and be done with it. Come, get out of that!" With which he coolly turned me out of my own chair, and sat down at my desk, where he immediately fell to scratching away for dear life.

"I hope the other Lilian has better manners than you," I remarked, but I am afraid it was lost upon him.

Before he got through the rascal had torn up three or four sheets of my best Crane's Distaff note-paper, to which he was helping himself, with admirable assurance. Not that I minded the paper, though writing paper does happen to be

my pet economy. I suppose everybody has one. John's, by the way, is matches. But it was so unusual to see John make a mess of a letter that it amused me.

At last he wheeled around and held out the following specimen of epistolary art:

"My Dear Miss Lamb:

"Your kind and cousinly letter is just at hand, and it is with genuine regret that I find myself obliged to disclaim a relationship which I should be proud to own. I fear your aunt Mrs. Ellerton will think me the most unprincipled of women when I confess that the name which graces the title-page of my book is only a *nom-de-plume*, selected on account of its smooth and flowing qualities. It had not occurred to me that a signature chosen and combined for purely æsthetic reasons, might already exist, as a family name, and I can only offer my sincere apologies to you for the liberty I have unwittingly taken. Meanwhile I cannot wholly regret a misunderstanding to which I owe the welcome assurance that my book has pleased you. Unknown to me as you are, your letter convinces me that you are one whose approval I should value.

"Allow me to add, that, as it is my earnest wish to preserve a complete incognito, my pub-

lishers themselves not being aware that my name is assumed, I shall rely upon your betraying only to your aunt, the fact that I am sailing under false colors.

"Under which circumstances, it is with unfeigned contrition that I continue to sign myself,

"Though most sincerely yours,

"LILIAN LESLIE LAMB."

"How's that?" asked John, who had been drumming the table during my thoughtful perusal of the letter.

"I should think that would settle the matter," said I.

"What do you mean?"

"I don't think you will hear from them again."

"It does n't sound rude, I hope."

"Rude! Quite the contrary. In fact I think it sounds a little chivalrous for a woman. But they won't suspect anything. And anyhow you certainly have not left the sign of an opening for another letter."

"How about the handwriting?"

"That smallish literary hand has n't

any gender. Besides, I don't know whether you meant to or not, but you 've minced your writing out of all nature."

"That 's so," said he. "But I did it without thinking."

He seemed somewhat depressed, but he sealed the letter—with my crest, by the way,—and after he had put it into the bag for the office boy to post, he cheered up and I supposed he would forget all about it.

IV.

POEMS, BY JOVE!

I HAVE often speculated as to why Brunt had so much feeling about that letter. I never felt quite sure whether it was the handwriting or only Fate. As nearly everything in the world is Fate, —everything, at least, but out and out pigheadedness—I suppose that it was Fate that did it. Still John was always a little conceited about his discrimination in regard to handwriting, and Miss Lamb's was about the best I have ever seen. It

had not only style and legibility, but unusual individuality. I only wish I could show it to you, but naturally I have not the originals of her letters.

There! Now, I have got ahead of my story! For I had meant to convey the impression at this point, that that was the end of the correspondence, as I am sure it ought to have been. I was intending to go on and give, with a few light touches, a sketch of Brunt as a society man; for he was quite stunning when he laid himself out, and I did not know but that I could remember some of the hits he made at the Van Deusenberg dinner the very next evening. But now that you know the correspondence went on, you will, of course, be in a hurry to hear about that, and you will not want to be told what Brunt was saying to some other girl whom you are not interested in. I think myself that a story is always a bore when it interrupts itself. Only I wish you had been at the dinner, as I was, to hear the discussion on *Spoils*. A

hostess would have been mortified to have given a dinner that year, in the course of which *Spoils* did not get talked about. They were comparing the book with something of Thackeray's, and Brunt would not hear of its holding a candle to Thackeray. In the heat of discussion, he said such severe things about the new novel that my neighbor confided to me that it only showed how jealous all the men were of Lilian Leslie Lamb!

Three weeks elapsed before the next letter came, and it was much more of a surprise to Brunt and me than it can possibly be to you, since you are prepared for it. The letter was a thick one, and I could hardly wait for John to put in an appearance at my office, which he had proposed doing that morning as he was expecting to hear from the Sandersons in regard to a ninth edition. I knew Miss Lamb's writing directly, of course. No one could ever mistake it. Brunt was as surprised as I had counted upon his being, and he

let the Sandersons' letter wait while he opened the Colorado one.

"Poems, by Jove!" he cried, and his face fell. "Ten to one they 're trash."

As he spoke a half-sheet slipped to the floor and I picked it up. It was a poem to "The Solitary Sandpiper," beginning:

> "Daintiest spirit of the wilderness,
> Prettiest fancy ever taught to fly."

I thought the verses mighty good, and I was pleased, afterward, when I found that John liked them too.

"Are they her poems?" I asked.

"She says not," he growled, "but here, I will read you what she writes." Which he proceeded to do, with occasional comments thrown in.

The letter began, "My dear Miss Lamb," without any allusion to the name being assumed, which I thought in very good taste.

The letter went on as follows:

"How you will regret the courtesy with which you responded to my first letter, when you find

that it has brought upon you another, and a far more troublesome one. I can imagine your consternation at sight of the enclosed poems, and I am well aware that my conduct in sending them to you is unjustifiable. When I say that I am sacrificing your convenience on the altar of a friendship of my own it will hardly seem to mitigate the wrong. Nevertheless, I throw myself upon your mercy. These poems are the work of one of my friends. She has written them from time to time in years past as a congenial exercise of her faculties rather than from any more ambitious motive. They seem to me to be not without value. My judgment, to be sure, does not count for much; yet hitherto I have known no one to whom I was willing to submit it in this matter. Ever since your letter came I have been possessed with the desire to have you see my friend's poems. I speak of her thus impersonally, in consideration of her wish to conceal her identity,—a feeling with which you, my dear Miss Lamb, must surely sympathize."

At this point the reader coughed slightly, but resumed:

"My friend's reticence in this respect is due to her extreme modesty—"

"Please observe that she does not, at

this point, pursue the comparison," John remarked in parenthesis—

"to her extreme modesty, which indeed is so fixed that it partakes of the nature of obstinacy. Yet a taste of success would certainly be a very deep gratification to one whose life has made her more familiar with disappointment and suffering than with brighter experiences. Will you, then, do me the favor which I ask? Will you read the poems I send you, and then, if your opinion of them should be favorable, will you give me a word of advice as to the best disposition to be made of them? The four poems enclosed are, I think, fairly representative of the whole collection. I am aware that we cannot expect their publication to prove a lucrative venture. The most we hope is, that they may pay their own way. We shall not look for an immediate reply. Should you be so good as to accede to my request, let me beg you to do so at such time as shall render the service least burdensome to you.

"Yours very sincerely,
"LILIAN LESLIE LAMB."

"Do you take any stock in the friend, Jack?" I asked.

"Not much," said he, with a sceptical scowl.

"You know she said in the first letter that she had n't any talents."

"She said she did n't *boast* any."

"Great Scott! Jack, what a memory you have!"

He was reading the poems with very respectful interest I thought, handing them to me as he finished them. Besides the "Sandpiper," there was a fanciful little love song, a sonnet which I could n't make much of, and the "Ballad of the Prairie Schooner," which has since become so popular. I could see that Brunt was a good deal impressed, and I did n't wonder. He read them all through several times and then he read the letter again. He always had a way of going on just as though I had not been by, which made everything very free and easy between us.

"Well, what do you think of them?" I asked, when he had had time to take them all in.

"I think them good," said he. "If the rest average as high, I should think they might stand on their own legs."

"Shall you write and tell her so?"

"What I should like would be to see the lot. But, confound it! that would involve a regular correspondence, and I should feel like a sneak and a villain."

"You don't want to make a clean breast of it?"

"No, I don't," he answered curtly.

"You might refer her to your friend, John Brunt. I'm sure if she has read your essay on "Verse *versus* Verse," she will have confidence in your judgment."

"Not such a bad idea," said John.

"An uncommonly good idea, if you would give a fellow his dues," said I.

"The handwriting is rather a hitch."

"Have n't you got a fellow copying for you somewhere? Make him write the Brunt letters."

"He can't sign for me."

"You can sign for yourself. You write

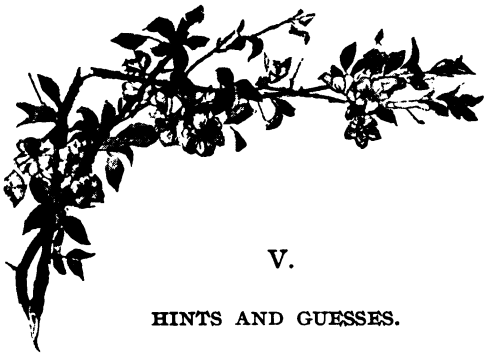
your name very differently from anything else. There is something quite reckless about your capital 'J,' and you would n't give Browning or Bismarck such a genial 'B' as you put into Brunt."

On second thoughts, however, he concluded that he would rather risk detection than do anything so roundabout as have an amanuensis, and, after much consultation, we agreed that if he continued to write extra small in his character as Miss Lamb, and if he were to exaggerate his own hand when it came time to assume the more familiar rôle of John Brunt, there would be nothing to excite suspicion. And events justified our confidence.

In his next letter, John, in the character of Miss Lamb, asked to be addressed,

"Care of F. Dickson, Esq.,"

which I thought indicated a greater impatience to receive his correspondent's future letters than literary people usually feel when appealed to in such a matter.



V.

HINTS AND GUESSES.

IT all came about very naturally — the correspondence with John, I mean. The two Miss Lambs agreed to turn all the manuscript over to Mr. Brunt, and in due course of time a package arrived, the size and weight of which would certainly have appalled a stouter heart than mine. Brunt, however, received it without flinching, and set to work, reading the contents, with very much the same dogged vim he used to put into his semi-annual "cram" at college. Only I doubt whether he ever found his Virgil or his Homer as interesting reading as these latest productions of the modern Muse.

His good opinion of the poems was, on the whole, confirmed, though he was rather taken aback by the character of some of them. An occasional note of bitterness was struck, which accorded ill with the easy tone of the author's letters — the author's letters, I say, for, with the best intentions, we could not fail to penetrate the thin disguise which Miss Lamb had chosen to throw about her identity. Happily, the misanthropic ones were of inferior merit, so that Brunt did not think it best to include them in the collection. But, as he said, their lack of artistic merit simply went to prove that they were a direct expression of a mood, which, though not poetical, was all the more likely to be real. If the public knew what he had spared them, they would be eternally grateful. As it is, I think all will admit that those pieces which he did select for publication, were well worth while. Take, for instance, the sonnet called "Knighted." Any one who is in the way of reading poetry

must be familiar with it. It is the only sonnet I ever went in for, but I think it regularly great. John says it 's not one of the best of the collection. He talks learnedly about the last two lines being a couplet, and says it gives the poem the flavor of an epigram. Flavor of fiddlesticks! I say it 's mighty good poetry, and most any fellow would like to have something similar written in honor of *him!*

But I must not go into the poems too much, for they are open to every one now. It is needless to say that John found a publisher for them. He usually does what he sets out to do, and, besides, the things only needed a friendly push in the beginning. The point of interest, as far as we are concerned, is the correspondence brought about by them.

Once launched in a straightforward correspondence in his own name, Brunt came out strong, and he conducted it with such skill as to draw the young lady out on more subjects than the main one. His

own letters would, I am sure, have been a mine of gold to any one, and Miss Lamb clearly found them so. As he proceeded to toss one nugget after another before her, the reserve with which she had entered upon the correspondence—the correspondence with John Brunt, you understand—gradually wore off, and she began sending him letters which were quite up to those she received. I say the reserve wore off, by which I mean that she began writing more fully upon this or that topic of general interest which John happened to broach in his letters. Yet when her correspondent happened upon any subject which she did not choose to follow up she could be as evasive as the Sphinx. Her letters to John were singularly impersonal. It was an interesting study to note the difference between those and the ones addressed to the fictitious Miss Lamb, to whom she occasionally wrote to report progress. The letters to John were longer and more varied, yet after reading a short note to "Miss

Lamb" we were both aware of having got a glimpse of the writer's personality, such as volumes of her letters to John would not have yielded.

What lent an added zest to our interest in Miss Lamb's letters was the skilful manœuvres by which the writer sought to conceal her identity with the author of the poems—or again, the cool and impersonal tone in which she wrote of them. In reference to a set of Love Sonnets which John thinks particularly good, the "Love Sonnets of Constance," she wrote:

"My friend was averse to offering these as well as some of the other pieces for publication lest they should be thought to be autobiographical. But I made haste to remind her that, as she would never be identified as the author, it could make no possible difference what people might think."

"If that is n't a pretty bit of defiance," John said. "The worst of it is, it convinces me that the poems in question *are* autobiographical."

"Why 'the worst of it,' Jack? What do you care about the state of mind of a woman you never set eyes upon?"

"Oh, I don't care, of course, only—blighted beings are not in my line."

But this particular "blighted being" proved to be very much in his line. He was just the man to feel the charm of a good letter, and, furthermore, he could never resist the fascination of an unproved point. We assumed that she was the author of the poems, but we were not in possession of certainty on the subject. Her age was also a much mooted question until we were lucky enough to get positive evidence on that point. The experienced tone of many of the poems had led us to think that she must be an older woman than we had at first supposed, but a chance conversation with Jim Arnold, the doctor, cleared that up for us.

It happened that Arnold dropped in at my rooms one evening and found *Spoils* lying on the table. I had been looking it through, as I often do to this day.

The beauty of *Spoils* is that it is such good reading! Arnold's eye happened to fall upon it, and he said he had often wondered whether its author might not be the Lilian Lamb he had known as a child, years ago when he was visiting in Connecticut.

"I was staying with one of my classmates," he said, "whose father's country place adjoined that of Mr. Louis Ellerton, a man who owned good horses. This Lilian Lamb was a niece of the Ellertons, a small child in a long-sleeved gingham apron, who was forever riding horseback on the branches of an old apple tree behind the house. One day her aged steed gave way, and down she tumbled with a broken arm. The village doctor was *non est cumatibus*, and I was called in to set the arm. I was a green hand and had n't got my surgical nerves in training. I thought the child would scream, and I was scared blue. It was a hateful fracture and it must have hurt atrociously. But the little thing bore it

like a soldier, and when I got through she said, 'Thank you, Doctor,' with the sweetest little quaver of a smile. You don't often see a girl of seven or eight with the pluck of a soldier and the manners of a lady. A thing like that shows brains as well as nerves, and I would give a good deal to know whether she wrote *Spoils*."

I did not volunteer any information on the subject. I was occupied with a simple sum in addition, by means of which I discovered that Miss Lamb could not then be more than twenty-five years of age.

John was greatly taken with the tale of the broken arm, which I made haste to pass over to him. But the fact of the young lady's youth did not shake his conviction that she wrote the poems.

"A woman like that," he said, "might have found time for plenty of experiences before she was twenty-five years old. She would probably make no more outcry over a broken heart than over a broken arm, and I can imagine

her being the best of company, when she was in the very thick of it. But if she happened to have a taste for writing she might take a fancy to put on paper what wild horses would not have dragged from her lips; and once having written such poetry as hers, she would have been more or less than human if she could have kept it to herself."

"I can fancy just what kind of a girl she is," John told me one day. "She is probably rather plain, but with a good deal of brilliancy of expression and a touch of cynicism in her face and in her talk. A flattering manner, I should say, but with the heart a little gone out of it. Just a little. Everybody would n't notice it."

"Only it could n't escape a student of human nature like you, Jack."

"Nor a master of satire like you, Francis. No, *we* should not be deceived."

And John pursued the correspondence with unabated vigor.

It is really a great pity that I have n't those letters, for, without having read them, it would be difficult to conceive of two sane men taking the step we perpetrated later on. As it was, the letters led up to it very naturally.

As the time for the appearance of the poems approached, Brunt began to urge upon Miss Lamb the necessity for furnishing some sort of *nom-de-plume* to distinguish the book from any other collection labelled simply *Verses*. Here is her answer :

MY DEAR MR. BRUNT :

You are perfectly right in requiring a distinguishing name for either the book or the author, and I have at last persuaded my friend to choose one for herself. She proposes to be called 'Leslie Smith.' The Leslie she adopts out of compliment to me. The Smith for the sake of obscurity. It seems to me rather a good combination, and, as for my own share in it, I am so puffed up by having my name for a second time associated with literature, that I am almost ready to take it as an omen of distinction. I shall not even be surprised to find myself perpetrating a literary feat one of these

days. When I do, I shall insist upon Miss Lamb's rendering up her own name for my use. Do you think she would? It would be no more than a fair exchange. I only hope it is a name I should fancy. Marion de Montmorency or something like that, high-sounding and impressive. For I propose to write nothing less than an immortal epic."

"That's a good one," I shouted, as John read me this part of the letter. "Confess, Jack, that is the first time a girl ever asked you, outright, to bestow your name upon her."

John laughed too, but with a slightly preoccupied air.

"I rather wonder that she should have ventured on the Leslie," he said, "but it makes a good name. There is contrast enough in it to make it hold together."

The poems of Leslie Smith were to appear early in January. It was not practicable to get them out for the holidays, and John said that was of no consequence. They were poems which would require time before they could gain general recognition. If there should be a demand

for them by the next holiday season it would be as much as we could hope for.

The business preliminaries being pretty well settled early in October, there seemed to be no special reason for keeping up so lively a correspondence as before. John evidently regretted this, and he cudgelled his brains for pretexts for writing. I do not mean that the letters ceased coming altogether, but there were pauses and John fretted. I was not surprised, about this time, to find him dwelling a good deal upon the winter climate in Colorado. He managed to beat up considerable information on the subject, and it all tended to prove that the man who had not seen Pike's Peak in mid-winter was a fit subject for commiseration. That, at least, was the drift of his communications to me. Preparing my mind, as I afterward learned, for his grand *coup*.

VI.

THE PILGRIMAGE.

ONE day about the middle of November, John stalked into my office with his most determined air. If any one were to ask me what I consider to be John Brunt's chief characteristic, I should say it was determination. I have a will of my own, as many people would readily testify. In fact, I have, in my own family, a reputation for being rather stubborn. But, Great Cæsar! I am a mush of concession compared to John when

once he has an idea. So when he marched into my office that morning,—there did n't happen to be any clients at the moment—I was curious to know what he was after. I could see that he was in good spirits to begin with.

"Hollo, Dick!" said he. "I hope that 's not a brief that I 'm interrupting."

It was in reality a letter to my father, thanking him for a very opportune remittance. But I did not think it necessary to explain, and I got it out of sight, saying, carelessly: "Never mind, old fellow! I 'm not pressed for time."

John grinned, in a way I did not altogether like, and sat down on the arm of a chair.

"Well, Dick," he said, without more ado, "where do you suppose you and I are likely to be, week after next at this time?"

"If we are together," I replied, "we are likely to be in this office."

"You 're out there!" he cried. "Better guess again."

"Perhaps you know more of my future

movements than I do," said I, pretending to resent his assumption.

"You may bet your hat I do!"

Sometimes when Brunt is in the very best of spirits, he relapses into the baldest slang. To rest his English, he explains.

"Bless you, Dick," I've heard him say, "you don't want to drive a willing horse to death—I should n't have any English left if I squandered it on you!"

"Perhaps you would be kind enough to enlighten me as to my immediate future," said I.

"Of course I will. That 's just what I looked in for," and he glanced at me quizzically, yet I fancied a little doubtfully too.

"Fire away," said I, "but just bear in mind that the lease of this office has another year to run."

John had walked to the window and stood with his back planted against it, fixing me with that look which I think I have mentioned before, as though he were taking aim.

"You and I," he announced with deliberate emphasis, "are to be in Colorado — don't interrupt me — scaling Pike's Peak, strolling through the Garden of the Gods, where we shall probably pluck Olympian bouquets, bowling over the limitless prairies" — this with a grand flourish,—"penetrating into inaccessible cañons——"

"And making the acquaintance of Miss Lilian Leslie Lamb," I suggested with a knowing smile. "It 's a good idea, old man. Go, with my blessing, and count upon my being with you in spirit."

"No, Dick! I would n't give a nickle for your spirit. It 's you I must have. Flesh and blood are good enough for me."

"You forget, my dear boy, that my flesh and blood are indispensably necessary to my clients—and also that the railroad companies have an unconquerable propensity to deplete the pocket-books of flesh-and-blood travellers. Mine is not plethoric."

"Out again!" cried John. "We are

both going at the invitation of my friend, Miss Lamb."

"At the invitation of Miss Lamb?" said I, rather stupidly I confess.

"Certainly. Of Miss Lamb, the distinguished novelist. If I am not too proud to accept such an invitation from a lady, why should you be? A new batch of four thousand is coming out for the holidays, and she wishes her collaborator —that is, myself—and her agent—that 's you, Dick—to regard the proceeds as their fair share of the plunder. She only stipulates that they shall enlarge their knowledge of the world, and especially of their own country, by taking the proposed journey, thus fitting themselves to——"

This being sheer bosh I put a stop to it, and a lively discussion ensued. The outcome of it was the triumph of Determination over Common Sense, by means of arguments which might be wearisome if repeated. Only one fact can be of interest—the fact that John's assertion was correct, that we were actually in Col-

orado Springs within two weeks of the time of that conversation.

In justice to myself, I should add that I am not in the habit of travelling about at my friends' expense, but that seeing how much John's heart was set upon my going with him—for he thinks more of me than one would suppose at the first blush, and I knew he would rather have me along than any one else, and that it would be rather slow music to go alone—considering that, I say, and that I should feel just as he did if the positions were reversed, and that he really was uncommonly flush just then (what a snarl a fellow gets into, by the way, when he talks apologetically!), I thought I might as well go, if only to keep him in countenance. I must also confess that I shared his interest in Miss Lamb so far as to feel that Pike's Peak dwindled to a mere nothing in comparison.

VII.

THE PRAIRIE.

IT was a glorious morning early in December when we arrived in Colorado Springs. In fact we never saw anything but glorious weather during our stay. We got there in the morning, and had a solemn consultation as to whether we had better present ourselves at Miss Lamb's door before or after luncheon. We learned that Mrs. Ellerton's house was only a few blocks distant from our hotel, and having fixed upon twelve o'clock as the latest

hour for which we could possibly wait, we seated ourselves upon the hotel piazza and endeavored to appreciate Pike's Peak. It did not seem to us very high, and it did seem uncommonly ugly, in spite of its nightcap of snow. But we looked at it hard for an hour, and then we started up Cascade Avenue in search of the house which was, properly speaking, the goal of our two-thousand-mile pilgrimage. Miss Lamb not having been warned of our approach, John had written a sort of note of introduction in that exaggerated hand which he had adopted in all his correspondence for some months past.

We found the house without difficulty, but we did not find the ladies. Mrs. Ellerton was "not at home," and Miss Lamb was out riding. We left the note and our cards, and turned away very much chagrined. I think we both had confidently expected to see Miss Lamb open the door to us herself, holding a half-finished sonnet in her left hand.

"What idiots we were," said John.

"Why idiots?" I asked.

"Never to have thought of her not being at home."

"Speak for yourself," said I.

At that moment a young woman on horseback cantered past.

"That girl rides well," I exclaimed.

"That's she," said John, and he turned abruptly round to watch her, regardless of manners.

"How do you know it is she?"

"That is the way she would ride."

"She does not look like the author of those melancholy ditties," I objected.

"No, but she looks like the author of the jubilant ones."

We were walking slowly back, and John was much elated at his own penetration when the lady stopped in front of the house we had just left, sprang lightly to the ground, patted her horse's nose, hitched him to the post, and went into the house. We were not quite a block away, so that we could see every movement plainly, though the face was not discernible.

"She walks as well as she does everything else," said John.

"Have you ever heard her play the piano?" I asked, satirically.

"I have an idea that she does n't play the piano," he replied, with perfect seriousness.

We were absurdly disappointed. Here we were in Colorado, and all we had got for our pains thus far was Pike's Peak. John swore he had never seen anything half so hideous, and I quite agreed with him.

As we came out from luncheon the bell-boy handed Brunt a note. John's face flushed up as he broke the seal.

"She invites us both to dinner in the name of her aunt, at half-past six this evening," he announced with a delighted grin.

"She 's a trump," said I.

We went for a ride ourselves that afternoon, out onto the plains. John said he wanted to get away from Pike's Peak. But when we turned to come back something had happened.

"By Jove!" we both cried in a breath, "look at that."

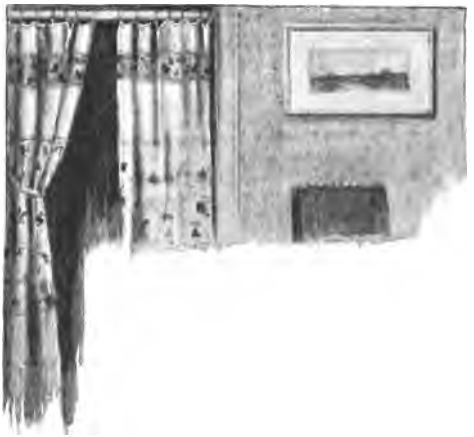
There was Pike's Peak apparently about fifty thousand feet high, with the sun just disappearing behind him, while to the southward another great mountain stood out, warm and mellow with the bloom of a damson plum upon it, and farther south yet, in the dim distance, there was a ghostly glimmering range of snow mountains that we had not seen before. To the northward all the hills were a sort of navy-blue.

One thing I had determined not to do, was to give any descriptions of scenery, mainly because I don't know how. But, upon my word, the bare facts of that sight were miles ahead of any description. The horses, too, had suddenly waked up, and bounded over the plain at a great rate. They kept abreast of each other in good shape, and the gait was so easy and so swift that we felt as though we were in a ship at sea.

Suddenly John cried: "I say, Dick,

let's yell! One, two, three!" and at the word we lifted up our two voices and shouted like wild Indians. Some cows chewing gravel on a little elevation that we happened to be passing—for they have nothing else to chew at that season—lifted their horned heads against the sky and gazed at us reproachfully, and a couple of prairie-dogs scampered across the plain and popped into their holes; but our unechoed shout reached no other ears, and we cantered on, much relieved by it.

It was dark before we got back, and a young moon appeared, tilting over the black shoulder of Pike's Peak, south of the nightcap. We and the horses calmed down and came in quite cool.



VIII.

WITHIN THE PORTIÈRES.

AN hour later, having hung up our overcoats in Mrs. Ellerton's hall, we turned to see two figures coming through the portières, and while the elder lady greeted me without venturing a guess as to which of us was which, Miss Lamb met John with extended hand, saying very warmly: "You are Mr. Brunt, I am sure."

I thought it an unfair discrimination though it was accidentally correct. John, to be sure, is bigger than I, but why should a big man be any more likely than one of more modest proportions to be a literary light? The worst of it was that John, when I sounded him later, would not own to having felt flattered. He seemed to take it for granted that she should know him at sight—quite as though he had been labelled "distinguished author." But she was very nice to me too, and we both felt at home immediately. John took the aunt in to dinner and I the niece, but it really made no difference, as there were only four of us.

This would be the moment to describe the two ladies if descriptions were in my line. Mrs. Ellerton, I thought, would have been a trifle commonplace if she had not been so perfectly well-bred; but perfect breeding is perhaps too unusual to leave its possessor quite without distinction.

Miss Lamb, with the black hair and blue eyes she had described, was not an out-and-out beauty, and yet I thought her uncommonly good-looking. John said, afterward, that she had frank eyes and a reserved mouth, and that that was why he liked her. I was amused at his definiteness, for I privately believed that, with his preconceived ideas, a frank mouth and reserved eyes would have pleased him just as well. What I liked about her was her self-possession and her cordiality. You felt her good-breeding, while there was that in her manner which made you think that she thought as much of you as she did of herself. But all this splitting of hairs is not in my line, and I will endeavor to confine myself to facts, —one of which is that Miss Lamb had long black eyelashes, which were highly becoming to the blue eyes.

John's visit, thanks to Mrs. Ellerton, was not wholly untroubled by embarrassment, and I wish I could describe his face when that good lady said to him:

"Do tell us, Mr. Brunt, something about Miss Lamb."

"Miss Lamb that is n't," her niece explained. "It is not fair, Mr. Brunt, to put your discretion to such a test."

"Thank you," Brunt answered gratefully. "Mr. Dickson and I *are* in rather a difficult position."

"Not at all," said I, cheerfully, thinking that the situation was worth working up. "We shall be happy to tell you anything about Miss Lamb which does not involve her identity. What would you like to know?"

"Oh, everything," said Mrs. Ellerton, hospitably. "Was *Spoils* her first novel?"

"Yes."

"Remarkable young woman! And is she delighted with her success?"

"There can be no doubt of that."

"How old a woman is she?"

"About thirty-five."

"Come, Dick, do you think that 's quite fair?" John remonstrated.

"Why not?" said I, airily. "The age wont identify her. There are plenty of women of thirty-five."

"Is she handsome?" asked Miss Lamb, with a smile. She was evidently amused at John's discomfiture.

"That is a question for you to answer, John," said I. "You're a better judge than I."

But instead of embarrassing him, this bold-faced attack on my part seemed to put John on his mettle, and he answered composedly: "She is very beautiful."

"Dark or fair?" asked Miss Lamb.

"A delicate blonde," John replied, with a perfectly straight face. "She has dreamy dark eyes but her skin is fair as a lily, and her hair is of that exquisite gold which seldom lasts into middle life. I have known her for years, and it seems to me she is as absolutely beautiful as she was when she was a girl."

"Very unlike one's idea of a middle-aged authoress," Mrs. Ellerton remarked; while Miss Lamb gave John a furtively

penetrating look. An inscrutable smile played about her lips. She clearly fancied that Mr. Brunt was betraying a deeper interest in the "delicate blonde" than he intended.

"Exactly," said John, in answer to Mrs. Ellerton's remark. "That is doubtless one reason why she has been so successful in maintaining her incognito."

"Is she of good family?" queried the genealogical aunt.

"I do not know much about her antecedents. She lives with an invalided father to whom she has devoted her life."

"Is she unmarried?" Mrs. Ellerton asked, with growing interest.

"Yes," said I, not wishing to be wholly left out of the conversation.

"She is much sought," Brunt answered. "Mr. Dickson, for instance, worships the ground she walks on. In fact, we are all more or less her slaves."

"John," said I, with emphasis, "I question whether my esteem for her is equal to yours."

"Possibly not," he admitted; "I only said that you adored her."

"And does any one besides yourselves suspect the authorship?" asked Miss Lamb.

"No," John answered. "Even her father is in ignorance of it. In fact," he went on, giving rein to his inventiveness, "it is out of consideration to him that she keeps the secret. He has a morbid horror of female celebrities. You could hardly deal him a more cruel blow than to tell him that it is his daughter who has written the book which is making such a stir."

"An aristocratic trait I am sure," said Mrs. Ellerton, complacently. "My father would have had the same feeling."

"Mine would n't have," said her niece. "I am sure, from what I remember of him, that papa would have been perfectly delighted with a talented daughter."

"My poor brother was very Western, you know," Mrs. Ellerton sighed. "Copper is so levelling," she added, turning to me for sympathy.

I have not mentioned it before, but I am said to have rather an aristocratic turn of countenance; a thing which probably invited the confidence of the genealogical aunt. I should, of course, prefer to be like Brunt, rugged and imposing, but if one must be on a smaller scale, one likes to have the qualities of one's defects.

By this time I, for one, was quite in a daze. But I reflected that the best thing I could do was to try and believe in the mythical Miss Lamb John had so vividly depicted, and I think it was this distinct image in my mind which kept me from making a mess of the secret on several subsequent occasions.

Meanwhile it seemed a pity to let slip so good an opportunity of getting a little information ourselves, so I presently said: "I wish, Mrs. Ellerton, you would reciprocate by telling us something about Leslie Smith the coming poet."

"I only wish I could," said Mrs. Ellerton, "but I really have n't the least idea who she is. Lilian is so secret about it

that I begin to suspect her of having written the poems herself, and to regret that I did not persevere in my attempt to read them all."

Miss Lamb listened without a shadow of self-consciousness, and said: "Don't be alarmed, Aunt Bessie. You will never have to blush over the discovery of a genius under your own roof."

We both pondered that speech and we both fitted it in our own minds with the same adjective; namely, *enigmatical.*

I was proud of John that evening. His little fiction about the other Miss Lamb seemed to have an exhilarating effect upon him, and I had never seen him more entertaining. Miss Lamb must have been interested, though she evinced her good breeding by showing me quite as much attention as she did John. Outwardly, indeed, I came out rather ahead, for while Miss Lamb's good manners led her to conceal the preference she must have felt for John, the aunt, with less tact, treated me with a marked con-

sideration which John did not share. Perhaps that was why I liked Mrs. Ellerton better than John did. You can't very well help liking folks who like you, especially when they seem to be rather superior, critical sort of people. And when she offered us Nestor cigarettes in the parlor, even John softened and discovered, as he afterward admitted, that "the genealogical fiend" was not quite without humanity.

There was an open wood fire in the parlor and a generally homelike air which we footsore travellers found much to our taste.

"How Eastern it seems!" said I to Miss Lamb, as we lighted our cigarettes.

"Dick does n't mean Oriental," John put in. "It is the Atlantic seaboard that he has in mind."

"It does seem like home," I maintained.

"We are so glad to hear you say so," said Miss Lamb. "We like, of all things, to hear any praise of our own hired house."

"It seems like our own house," Mrs. Ellerton added comfortably. "It is so full of our own things. We have lived here four years. I am sure I don't know why we don't go away."

"But I know why," said her niece. "It is because we have a genealogical neighbor next door."

"And you?" asked Brunt.

"I? oh! I can't leave Cheyenne Cañon,—to say nothing of Aunt Bessie. And I am afraid a change of climate might not agree with Tiger."

"Tiger is——?"

"My horse. His real name is Tiger-eye. When you see the gloss on his neck you will know how he came by the name. Tiger has never been lower down in the world than six thousand feet above sea-level. And, besides, he is very fond of the Cañon and of the Mesa. Do you like it?" she asked, abruptly.

"We hated it this morning," said John.

"I am glad of that. Every real Coloradoan hates it at first."

"But we did n't hate it long," I explained. "It was magnificent this afternoon, riding over the plains."

"Over the plains!" she cried. "And not over the Mesa! What remarkable tourists you are! How did you escape going first to the Garden of the Gods?"

"They told us we ought to, and so John would n't."

"I admire you. You are the great unprecedented."

"As a reward, we might take you through the Garden of the Gods tomorrow," said Mrs. Ellerton.

"Or as a punishment," her niece amended. "They would much prefer to ride or walk."

We protested, and the drive was arranged.

"Well," said I, as we closed the gate behind us—

"Well!" said John—

"Pike's Peak improves on acquaintance."

"Pike's Peak is great!"

And John lighted a cigar and nodded approvingly at the enormous hump of a mountain. The nightcap looked very pretty in the starlight.

I waited for John to say something more, for I wished the expression of his views to be quite spontaneous. But he did not seem to feel communicative, and I had to begin.

"How about the cynicism, Jack?" said I, at last.

"It is n't visible to the naked eye."

"And the poems. Do you believe she wrote them?"

"She does n't look it. But it is difficult to judge. What do you think about it, Dick?"

"Women are deep," said I, thinking it best to be non-committal.

We discussed the question off and on as we walked up to the north end of the town and back, but we did not get much enlightenment. It was clear which way our wishes went. John did not wish her to have written the poems, while I did.

I was charmed with the idea of conversing with an agreeable young lady, who was apparently in the best of spirits, and of being at the same time aware that she was the prey to despair. There had been moments during the evening when I was almost able to fancy that I could hear the "worm i' the bud"; but while Miss Lamb's cheek was not exactly damask, it did not, on the other hand, look as though it had furnished many repasts. It was merely a very sound and normal specimen of its kind. All the better. It was, perhaps—nay, probably—a mask, behind which lurked who could say what chagrins and disenchantments. In our future intercourse with Miss Lamb I was eagerly on the look-out for signs of hidden anguish, while John was searching for proofs that she did not write poetry. It may as well be confessed that one of us was not much more successful than the other; that there was nothing in her appearance or behavior to make Miss Lamb seem other than rather a finished

young woman of the world, with mind enough to have written good verses if Nature had given her the bent, and balance enough to keep her own counsel on any and every subject.

IX.

THE GATEWAY.

NOW that I have once begun describing things, I find I have quite a taste for it, and I should like nothing better than to try my hand on the Garden of the Gods. How the huge red "Gateway" appears as you drive across the Mesa,—in fact the Mesa itself, that splendid natural boulevard away up in the air, with the plains below on the one hand, and the mountains rising up on the other, and the silvery line of leafless cotton-

woods, running like a brook from the entrance to Glen Eyrie along the road to the Gateway. But what I should like best would be to describe the Gateway itself, made of two thundering great red rocks standing up on end, with Pike's Peak looming in fine style beyond, and a delicious blue sky overhead. We liked it better than we had meant to, for, as John said, it was undeniably theatrical, and it ought not to appeal to a refined taste. But Miss Lamb said she hated a refined taste, and Mrs. Ellerton remarked that she could n't see anything exactly unrefined about the Garden, though she often wished the rocks were of a quieter color.

"O Aunt Bessie!" Miss Lamb cried, "you don't know what you are saying! It is the color that makes Colorado so adorable. I am sure that when we go East we shall find green quite tame by comparison."

"Oh! I would n't have the rocks green," Mrs. Ellerton replied, with a gleam of

humor. "Only sometimes when the sun strikes them they seem to glare at one."

Before going through the Gateway we drove to the northern end of the massive wall of rocks and stopped in the shadow. They call the view there, where only the narrow upright end is visible, the Tower of Babel; but, as John said, it looked more like the prow of a great ship bearing down upon us.

"That is what I always think of," said Miss Lamb. "I sometimes feel quite afraid to stand here in the shadow. It seems as though it must come rushing upon one, or topple over from the shock of arrested motion. In the summer, when it does n't cast a shadow just here, you don't have at all the same impression. I never come here in summer."

"Then you enjoy the feeling of imminent destruction?" John asked.

"I like *power*," she answered.

"Then," thought I to myself, "you are pretty sure to like John, for he is power personified."

Mrs. Ellerton and I, meanwhile, talked plain English on the back seat.

"I never before knew Lilian to let any one else drive," Mrs. Ellerton observed. "She is not usually happy unless she holds the reins."

I hoped John did not hear this remark, for I thought it would make him conceited. But Miss Lamb must have heard it, for she immediately turned to John and asked: "Does the make-believe Miss Lamb like to drive?"

"She never gives up the reins," John replied.

"Does she drive well?"

"She thinks she does."

"And you?"

"I think she does too."

"Is there anything she does not do well?" asked Mrs. Ellerton.

"According to John, I don't believe there is," I answered.

"There are a good many things she does not do at all," said John.

"What are they?" queried Miss Lamb.

"Oh, all sorts of womanly accomplishments. Needle-work and piano playing and sketching in water colors."

"She writes a very good note."

"Do you claim that as a womanly accomplishment?"

"Not exclusively. But it is an accomplishment of hers."

Everything seemed to conspire to tickle John's vanity.

"The critics think she has an 'almost masculine power,'" I observed, casually. "Do you see anything of that in her letters?"

"Oh, no! Her letters are extremely lady-like. Don't you think so, Aunt Bessie?"

"I beg your pardon," said Aunt Bessie. "I am afraid I was not listening. I was trying to make out whether that rock was Ben. Butler or the Irish Emigrant."

"It is too good a rock for either," her niece protested. "Is n't it a shame," she continued, turning to me, "to call these splendid rocks names!"

Miss Lamb always had a very kind way of referring things to me, but I did not deceive myself for a moment.

"Speaking of names," I said, "what a pity that Pike's Peak could not have been called something else."

"Yes," said John. "Aside from its ugliness, it is absurd to call a great round dome like that by such a spikèd name."

"We thought so, too, at first," said Miss Lamb. "We decided it ought to be called the 'Manitou.' That would have been both sonorous and significant. But after a while we got to like Pike's Peak, perhaps because it was so grotesquely inappropriate, and when our Swedish parlor-maid called it 'the Pike,' we felt that that could not be improved upon, and 'the Pike' it has remained in our vocabulary."

Undeniably Miss Lamb had humor. But then, so had Leslie Smith. Some of the poems were as sparkling as others were lugubrious. They were evidently the work of a many-sided genius. It

was perplexing and it was ludicrous too, I must admit. The young lady was so unconscious of the scrutiny she was undergoing, and she made her little remarks so totally unaware of the way they were being twisted and turned by two inquiring minds! I do not think, however, that John listened in the same spirit of investigation that animated me. Occasionally some chance word of hers may have aroused his suspicions. It was probably in a spirit of speculation that he suddenly asked Miss Lamb if she remembered Leslie Smith's poem comparing Colorado to Egypt.

"Yes, indeed," she said; "I remember it perfectly. The resemblance is very striking."

"Were you ever in Egypt?" I asked.

"Yes, I went there with my uncle and aunt before we came to Colorado. We were all impressed by the similarity in climate and general aspect when we came here."

How coolly she said it! Yes, women are deep.

But while John may have found food for reflection in such coincidences and suggestions, I think that, as a rule, when in Miss Lamb's society, he was too much occupied with her as she chanced to reveal herself, to revert to any surmises as to her concealments.

We had driven the length of the "Garden," and were passing out by what Miss Lamb called the "Back Gate," a passage between two huge boulders, one of which is quite the conventional balance rock, excepting that it is brick-red. After that, there was no scenery to speak of (for we turned our backs to the mountains) until, as we returned over the lower Mesa, we got a broad view of the plains to the eastward. The vast, undulating expanse, streaked with mysterious currents of light, looked wonderfully like the sea, with the bluffs or "buttes" rising here and there like rock-bound islands, and the smoke from a distant railway train simulating an out-going steamer.

"To return to the ever interesting author of *Spoils*," said Miss Lamb, as we crossed the bridge over the totally dry bed of the Monument River. "Do you not think Miss Lamb's handwriting very like a man's?"

"Oh, all literary people write alike," I made haste to say. "I wish you could see Mrs. Raynor's handwriting. It is so like Brunt's that you could scarcely tell them apart."

This was pure fiction, but the moment was critical.

"I think you must be right," Miss Lamb replied. "Do you know, I find Mr. Brunt's hand and Miss Lamb's of exactly the same character. His is naturally a little larger and bolder, but there is exactly the same turn in both."

"I have noticed it myself," said Brunt, imperturbably. "It is really singular that two people of such different temperament should write so much alike. It is enough to refute all theories as to the

significance of the handwriting in character-reading."

"Have you heard from Miss Lamb recently?" Mrs. Ellerton asked.

"Dickson hears from her oftener than I do," was John's reply. "What was your last news, Dick?"

"My last news of her," said I, promptly, "was that she thought no beings so enviable as those who were in Colorado. She inquired very particularly for you, Miss Lamb, and said she wished she might hear from you again. She said you were too chary of your letters."

"She is very kind, I am sure," said Miss Lamb, a little coolly I thought, "but I should be sorry to encroach upon her time without even a poor pretext."

"I should think your time and attention were to be considered also," said John. "Believe me, Miss Lamb, you get the best of authors in their books. It does not often pay to correspond with them."

"What heresy!" cried I. "You are

a real dog in the manger, Jack. You know there is no one whose letters you enjoy as you do those of the author of *Spoils.*"

"Perhaps I have a pretext for writing," said Miss Lamb, relenting. "She would be interested to hear my account of your visit. Do you really think it would not be a bore to her if I were to write?"

As I assured her of the pleasure it must give, especially with such subjects as ourselves to expatiate upon, we drove up before Mrs. Ellerton's door, and John, handing Miss Lamb from the buckboard, said: "When are we to have a business talk?"

"Whenever you will be so kind as to come and see me," she replied, graciously.

"May I come this afternoon?"

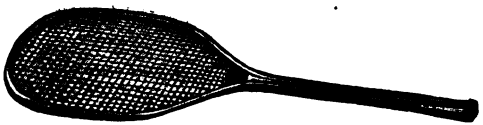
"Pray do. I am sure I could not wait much longer before talking over our book."

"Dick," said John, as we drove down the avenue, "I did not know you were such an unconscionable villain."

"I did not know it myself, dear boy!" said I, without looking at him. I did not particularly care to see the expression of his face. But I went on, callously: "I don't know when I have been so pleased with myself. Could n't you make use of my character in your next work of fiction? 'The Traitor Confidant' would be a capital title, and I shall take great pleasure in furnishing more 'copy' for the character."

"But, Dick, don't you see what a shabby trick you have played upon Miss Lamb?"

"Of course I do. That is where the villainy comes in. And won't it be nuts when the letter arrives!"



X.

CONFIDENCES.

THAT afternoon, as John and I were smoking on the hotel piazza, who should turn up but Ned Randall. We used to see a good deal of Ned at the Pow-wow and elsewhere, but after he went West we lost track of him. It was mighty pleasant to run across him in this way, and when he said there was tennis to be had at the Club grounds, and proposed our going up, I thought I had never liked him so well. As for John, he declined the invitation on the score of a previous engagement so cheerfully that I was disgusted with him.

"Can't you cut your engagement?" Ned urged. "We 've got some pretty good players up there."

"I should like to have a whack at them some other time," John said, "but I can't come this afternoon."

"All right," said Ned. "We have tennis all the year round in Colorado, so you are not likely to lose your chance."

"What are you going in for out here, Ned?" I asked, as we walked up the avenue.

"Tennis and real-estate."

"Which do you make the most money at?"

"Not at tennis," said he. "I own some pretty good property out here. That, for instance," he added, as we passed Mrs. Ellerton's gate.

"The deuce you do!" said I, with undisguised astonishment. In old times Ned did not enjoy the reputation of being a financial genius. "How did you do it?"

"I did n't do it. The town did it. It has been growing like a mushroom ever since I came out, five years ago, and I had the luck to chip in just in time."

"You know Miss Lamb then."

"Of course I do. But how did you come to know her? She is a Connecticut girl to begin with, and she has n't lived in the East since she left school."

"I wonder what makes them stay on here?" I queried, after having explained our acquaintance after a fashion. "Mr. Ellerton died here, did he not? I should think the associations might be painful."

"I don't think Mrs. Ellerton is enterprising enough to go away. All the enterprise she possesses goes into genealogy. And by the way, Dick, you had better look out how you let her know that you are a Rhode Island Dickson. If once she gets hold of that fact you will wish you had been born a 'mick.'"

Ned does not belong to the swell Randall family. I suppose he had been forced to confess as much in response to Mrs. Ellerton's investigations. Perhaps that was why he spoke with such asperity.

"Nice girl, Miss Lamb seems to be," said I, tentatively.

"Nice girl! I rather guess! I never saw any one nicer. I say, Dick, neither of you fellows are going to carry her off, I hope."

"Not that I know of. But I should think there might have been plenty to try for it before now."

"Might have been. Only I don't believe any one ever screwed up his courage to ask her. *I* never did!"—this with a profound sigh.

"Is she so stiff?" I asked, ignoring the implied confidence.

"Not so much stiff as—" he paused for the word,—"let us say *lucid*. A fellow would have to be a bigger fool than I am to imagine that he had a chance."

"And you don't think she ever cared for anybody?"

"Well, of course I can't say. There has n't been any one out here that she would be likely to fancy, and she was a mere chicken when she came. Why do you ask?"

"I was only trying to get some clue to her lucidity. It is n't so common."

At this moment our arrival at the Club grounds put an end to confidences.

I have sometimes wished that people were not so inclined to make a confidant of me. They are always telling me their love affairs. Yet perhaps it is a safeguard. For just as soon as I make the acquaintance of a nice girl some fellow is sure to tell me, under the seal of secrecy, that he adores her, so that my own feelings don't get a chance to spring up. But, as I say, that is perhaps just as well, for I am not a marrying man, and it might be awkward to get stirred up over somebody for nothing. Though possibly if I happened to like a girl as much as all that comes to, my views might change. That however would n't fill the exchequer. If I had come out West to be sure, as Ned wanted me to, I might have owned houses and things too. But I think, on the whole, I prefer New York, and as long as a few of the Pow-wow escape the ravages of matrimony, life must still be pleasant.

I was interested in Ned's confessions,

fragmentary as they were. I rather hoped he would tell me some more sometime. I never pry into other people's affairs however, but John says that is the very reason they all want to tell me their secrets. John has noticed it, and he once said some very kind things about it. John is such a good fellow! He would give the very Devil his dues!

The tennis was pretty fair, though Ned started me off with some young ladies and so I did n't go it quite so hard as I should have liked to.

When I got home I found John reading a New York paper in the office.

"How was the business talk?" I asked, as we stepped out into the deserted piazza. It was the dark end of twilight, and a few scattered stars were pricking through.

"First rate," said he.

"Did you get any light on the great subject?"

"Not a ray."

"Did you discuss the poems?"

"Some of them."

"What did she have to say about the sonnets of Constance?"

"Nothing."

"Did n't they come up?"

"No. She did n't mention them, and I had n't the cheek."

"Oh, I say, Jack; you might have got something out of her. Could n't you tell whether she took your observations in a personal spirit? Women are always so personal, don't you know? At least that is what you literary fellows say about them, though I don't myself see how they could be much more personal than the rest of us! But come, now, you 're an observer of human nature. Could n't you detect 'the personal element'?"

"Stuff, Dick! of course it was personal to her! Whether she wrote the poems or not, their publication is all her doing. I wish you could have seen her face, though, when I told her that Nelson Guild liked the poems and was going to notice them."

"How did it look?"

He pointed to a bouncing great planet that was shining away in the west.

"It looked like that star," said he.

"When only one is shining in the sky,"

I ventured to quote in a sentimental tone. He did not object to the amendment and I wished I had not said it.

As I look back upon that time the situation seems to me more than ever preposterous. For two grown men to leave New York in the height of the season and travel two thousand miles, merely for the sake of giving one of them an opportunity to fall in love with a girl neither of them had ever seen, and one who, unless all signs failed, was already the unfortunate possessor of a broken heart! But geniuses are erratic, and if you allow yourself to get entangled with a genius you never know what you may be led into.

Yet I may as well say, right here, that I, for my part, had a rousing good time of it, with tennis and riding, and lots of nice

people, and weather fit for a king. One scarcely missed the Pow-wow and the German opera, and as for clients, one forgot that one had so few to forget.

XI.

A DILEMMA.

THE next morning Brunt went off to the tennis court with some fellows he knew, while I started up Pike's Peak Avenue on a shopping expedition in search of a birthday present for my sister May. If I were the hero of this story I should not confess how fond I am of shopping, but, as it is, there can be no harm in owning that I spent a good two hours among the Chinese bric-a-brac and Indian and Mexican curiosities displayed in the shops. I soon lighted upon a pretty trifle for May, but meanwhile I had come across a couple of Navajo

blankets and some skins that were not to be so easily disposed of. Not that I had any hundred-dollar bills to squander on such things, and it was the hundred-dollar ones which invariably took my fancy; but they were spread out invitingly and one could enjoy them without incommoding anybody. What took my eye most of all was a royal Bengal tiger skin, with head and paws finely mounted, which an enterprising furrier had imported on speculation. He was a splendid fellow—the tiger, I mean,—magnificently striped. He must have been the lord of his jungle, and the more I looked at him, the more I wanted him to belong to John. I could not conveniently purchase him with my unaided resources, but it struck me that if ever an occasion should arise for the Pow-wow to make John a present, this would be the fellow to choose.

Finding it was getting on toward noon, I took leave of his feline majesty, and strolled up the avenue toward the tennis

ground. Though the thermometer had spent the night burrowing down well below zero, it had arrived at less inhuman regions early in the morning, and now, at noon, the sun was so strong, that I was not surprised to see Mrs. Ellerton, well wrapped up, sitting in a steamer chair on her south piazza. It looked very pleasant there, and thinking that the tennis would be about over, I took the opportunity to make my party call.

"This is very good of you, Mr. Dickson," said the lady, coming forward, with a pleasant air of welcome, which reminded me of her niece. There is a strong family resemblance, in spite of their unlikeness.

"Lilian has not come in from riding, and I am quite too lazy to do anything but sit in the sun and be glad of pleasant company."

"Thanks," I said, taking a chair. "How surprisingly warm the sun is."

I should not report such very commonplace observations, only I fancy they

give an air of naturalness to the story, and besides, if I were to confine myself exclusively to picked conversations, it would be making us out more brilliant than we were.

"Your niece is very fond of riding?" I went on, in the same vein.

"Oh, very! I was, myself, at her age, though I never had her fancy for riding alone. She says she does not often find any one who is as good company as Tiger."

"Ah ha!" thought I to myself. "Your niece is communing with the Muse, O unsuspecting aunt!"

"Has n't she a dog?" I asked—audibly.

"No, and it is a great pity, for she is fond of dogs. She lost a beautiful Irish setter last year—poor Cop! (short for Copper). He was kicked by a vicious horse. It was a most distressing thing. We had just come in from driving, when the accident occurred. It was beginning to rain a little. Dear old Cop had been so happy, running on ahead of us, and scampering

about the fields after prairie-dogs which he never caught. I remember that very day, Lilian said that she did believe that Cop knew as much as grown folks! It was a passing horse that did it. Poor Cop was flung to one side of the road, in a dreadful condition, and there he lay, moaning like a child. Lilian was beside him in an instant. We saw that he must die, and she would not have him moved. We laid the carriage rug over him to keep the rain off, and then she sat down beside him, in all the mud, and put her hand under his head, and he stopped moaning and licked her hand. Poor fellow! he died licking her hand."

I looked out upon the scene of the tragedy with much sympathy as Mrs. Ellerton rambled on.

"She won't have another dog, which is a pity. I wanted to give her one on her birthday, soon after, but she suspected my intention and begged me not to do so. He was a setter and quite as handsome as Cop—with even a better pedigree,—but

Lilian declared she did not want a dog as handsome as Cop. I told her how fond she would get of him, and she said that was just the trouble. She knew Cop would never have loved another mistress, and she did not wish to love another dog, for the present at least. It would be too cold-blooded. Afterward she relented so far as to beg me to buy him for myself. She said she would steel her heart against him. Of course I did n't want him. What should I do with a dog? They are a great care."

"Don't you think she would have got fond of him?" I asked. For this was truly interesting. A girl who would not have another dog would be just the girl to cherish a hopeless affection. Besides which, here was more circumstantial evidence in the case. I remembered a particularly taking poem "To Cop."

Mrs. Ellerton was saying: "Why, no! She would n't have allowed herself to grow fond of the new dog. She said she would n't."

"Has she such a strong will?"

It began to seem as though the two Lilians might be a good deal alike.

"Yes, she has a strong will, but she says she is n't stubborn, and I don't know that she is. Only she wont drive a horse with a check-rein on. She does not approve of the overhead checks they use here. It is rather a trial to me. I like to see a horse's head held up."

"She does n't seem morbid, either," I ventured to remark, feeling somewhat like a detective.

"No, she does n't seem morbid; and there she is," Mrs. Ellerton added, as the sound of a horse's hoofs caused her to look up.

I ruminated a good deal on that answer of Mrs. Ellerton's. Was it purposely evasive? Did she know about the "worm i' the bud"? If not, why did she merely echo my words, instead of frankly saying "She *is* not morbid."

For the moment I had only time to get to the block and help the young lady

dismount. She accepted my help with a delicious lightness, as though it might amuse me, and could n't hurt her.

"I have been watching Mr. Brunt at tennis," she said, as she stroked the tiger-eye neck, which arched itself in grateful response.

"How did you like his playing?"

"Like it!" she cried, with mock solemnity. "I regarded it with fear and respect."

"He does play well, does n't he?" I asked, for I am immensely proud of John's tennis. So different from what you would expect of a literary man.

"He plays to win!" she said, and then, laughing: "I trust I may never be called upon to play against him."

"He does serve like a streak of lightning," I admitted, "and it is not easy to surprise him."

Miss Lamb disappeared within the house, returning in a moment with a letter in her hand.

"I suppose," she said, with a slight

hesitation, "I suppose Miss Lamb's letters are forwarded from your office, but it seems rather a round-about way of approaching her, when you are on the spot. Would it be asking too much of you, to forward this to her?"

"Not in the least," I said. "It shall go this very day."

"Thank you."

She handed me the letter and then stood striking her habit lightly with her riding whip.

"Is Miss Lamb at home?" she asked, with an odd look which I have since recalled. "Will she be likely to get my letter without delay?"

"She is away from home just now, but I know her address. There shall be no delay."

"I am glad of that." Then, after a slight pause: "I was wondering how soon I was likely to have an answer."

I made a grave calculation.

"I think," said I, "that you might have an answer a little sooner than usual,

say in six days, if she replies immediately, as she doubtless will do if the letter is important,"—this with a diplomatic inflection which might be taken as interrogatory or not.

"It is not exactly that," she said, thoughtfully. Then, looking up with a deprecating smile, and a pretty motion of her head: "Oh no! It is not in the least important. She may not answer it at all, though I hope she will. Don't you think she will?"

"I am sure of it!" I cried, with effusion. "I know how much she values your letters."

She looked at me with the same odd smile.

"How well you and Mr. Brunt know Miss Lamb!" she said. "But I must go now and dress for luncheon. Perhaps you will stay. No? Some other time, then."

"Be sure you don't forget my letter," she called, over her shoulder, as she stood in the doorway.

A riding habit is extremely becoming to some women.

I do not know why it had not occurred to me that I should be asked to forward that letter, for of course nothing could be more natural. But the possibility had not entered my head, and as I walked back to the hotel with the thing in my pocket I did not feel at all easy in my mind. Somehow when the letters were coming in due course of mail, addressed to that well-known personage, Lilian Leslie Lamb, I had handed them over to John without the least compunction—even the occasional ones from Miss Lamb. To all intents and purposes he was Miss Lamb, for the letters were intended for the author of *Spoils*.

Now, however, the case was quite different, as anybody must see. As I thought of it I grew hot and cold, and cursed my own idiocy for deliberately setting such a trap for myself. I was in such a muddle over the whole thing by the time I got to the hotel that I decided not to say any-

thing to Brunt about it till I had got my own ideas straightened out a little. However, by the time luncheon was over, and we were sitting, the sole occupants of the smoking-room, I had decided that, though I had got Jack into the scrape, he would have to get himself out of it. So with as indifferent an air as I could muster, I said:

"By the way, John, here 's a letter for the author of *Spoils*." He took it and glanced at the superscription.

"The Devil!" said he, with a very red face.

"The writer would be flattered if she could hear you," said I.

"I wonder how she would feel if she could see us both," John retorted, and he looked from the back of the letter to me in a very fierce manner. Then, tossing the letter across the table, he said: "Well, it is your affair this time and not mine, I 'm thankful to say. What are you going to do with the thing?"

"Do with it? I 've done with it," said I.

"You wont leave it there on the table, I suppose."

"I have delivered it to the person to whom it is addressed."

"Is it addressed to me?"

"It is addressed to the author of *Spoils*. If the author of *Spoils* is not the dream of beauty you described to her namesake that is your look-out not mine. Seriously, Jack, I don't see but that you 've got to read the letter. She evidently expects an answer to it. Either that," I added, "or make a clean breast of it."

The "*either, or*" is usually John's method, but this time it did not seem to appeal to him. It must be confessed, too, that his adviser was rather half-hearted in his counsel. So we beat about the bush in an unsatisfactory manner, till suddenly John seized a pen and cut the gordian knot, so to speak, by filling out the address:

"Care F. DICKSON, Esq., etc.,
"New York."

"There," said he, eying his handiwork with a look of relief. "Perhaps when it comes back postmarked and smutched by contamination with the mail-bags I may know what to do with it, but I 'll be blessed if I could break the seal of that spotless envelope to save my soul."

And he marched forth to post it with his own hand.

That was after all the best solution for the time being, and we both felt that a weight had been lifted from our minds.

XII.

HER CAÑON.

FOR a few days we did not see as much of Miss Lamb as John, for one, would have liked. We found we knew a good many people, and there were dinners and picnics and tennis galore. Sometimes we met Miss Lamb on these occasions, and sometimes we did not, but even when she was of the party she was usually taken possession of by people who seemed to think they had a prior claim.

One night there was a heavy fall of snow and, the next morning, the sun was shining like mad and all the world was glittering white. The mountains were much improved by this dispensation, and though the snow in the streets had vanished by noon, and the foothills soon shook it off, the high mountains were not so bare after that, and the nightcap had turned into a superb snowy canopy which was immensely becoming to Pike's Peak.

We had promised Miss Lamb not to visit North Cheyenne Cañon until she should give us leave. She said, when we first came, that there was too much ice for a comfortable ride, and, as she justly observed, one could not appreciate nature with one's thoughts all bent upon one's horse's feet.

The snow having blanketed the ice and rendered the road passable, we took advantage of the favorable circumstance, and one morning soon after, we found ourselves cantering, I and the two Lilians,

through the town and out toward Cheyenne Mountain. It was an exhilarating ride in the frosty air, with the sun blazing upon our backs and the buttresses of Cheyenne frowning down more and more superbly as we approached them.

"Mr. Dickson told me of your Indian war-whoop out on the plains," Miss Lamb said, as we rode along three abreast. "I know just how you felt when you did it."

"Try it yourself some time," said John. "It will do you lots of good."

"Oh, no! That is one of a woman's disabilities. If I were to try to shout, the result would be a shriek. Women are always in danger of doing something shrill if they allow themselves the slightest intensity."

"Yes, a 'slight intensity' might be shrill," John admitted with a laugh. "Did you ever run across anything so phenomenal?"

"Indeed I have," she rejoined, good-humoredly. "It is the most common

form of weakness. Have you never met with it?"

"You convince me that I have," said John, who is always delighted if he can get anybody to talk in riddles to him. "Is it not a characteristic of Lila Jean in *Spoils*?"

"Precisely," she agreed. Then turning to me: "That was rather well parried, don't you think? Henceforth 'slightly intense' is promoted from the level of bad English to that of an elaborate theory."

"Speaking of *Spoils*," she said later, as the horses fell into a walk, "you have never told me, Mr. Brunt, how you like the book."

"I think it an unusually strong novel. Do not you?"

"Oh, there can be no doubt about that."

"But you do not altogether like it?"

"Yes, I think I do. Yes, I like the book very much indeed. I am not sure that Maud is not my favorite heroine.

It is Lansinge whom I am not quite reconciled to."

"Why not?"

"I suppose, because he is not enough of a hero to suit my romantic notions."

"He is surely the central figure of the book. I think myself he is the best-conceived character in it."

"That may be. Indeed, I am sure it is. But he is not straightforward enough for my taste."

"He does finesse, I grant you. But he is never dishonorable."

"Dishonorable? Oh, no! There are many degrees between dishonorableness and the sort of transcendent integrity one requires in a hero. I suppose Lansinge is pretty honest as men go. I mean humans in general—and—here is the cañon."

We had been walking our horses for some time through the snow which was deep in the shade of the evergreens. The entrance to the cañon was not so marked as to be fixed at any one point, but at

Miss Lamb's word a sort of hush seemed to descend upon us, much as though we had entered one of those solemn old cathedrals in South Germany. The road was narrow, so that we soon went single file. Miss Lamb led the way, her horse making the first marks in the unbroken snow. Not strictly the first marks, however, for soon our guide turned and pointed out to us the tiny footprints of little creatures who had crossed the open space in search of water from the ice-thatched brook. Some of them we thought must have been coyotes, the tracks being as large as a child's shoe. But oftener the little marks suggested rabbits and squirrels, timid, furry bits of wild life, the thought of whose bright eyes and quick, sensitive motions seemed to animate the lonely scene. Once in a while we came to a bridge over the frozen brook, whose course the road followed. In the shadow of the gigantic gray and red walls on whose perpendicular heights there was no chance for the snow to cling,

the network of leafless bushes, bending over the brook, was glittering with ice, while the branches of the blue-green fir-trees, drooped beneath their feathery burden. The way those walls towered up above it all was astonishing, with the sky like a blue roof spanning the interval.

I rode last, and it was pretty to see the other horses winding on ahead. I do not know that I ever saw a woman ride so well as Miss Lamb. If you notice, lots of women make a good appearance when the horse canters or trots. When the motion is marked they get going with it very well. But there was a litheness about Miss Lamb's figure, even when the horse was laboring up hill with his head hanging, which was rhythmic as music.

After a while we came to a widening of the cañon, where a cloisteral group of trees made a natural resting-place. Here our guide turned and waited for us. She had a brilliant color which quite flashed upon one, after having watched her dark hair and habit so long. At the moment

I could not but admit that there was something incongruous in the supposition that she was the author of those metrical laments.

"Your cañon is very fine," said John, lifting his hat in chivalrous style.

"I am glad to see that you acknowledge my ownership," she responded, gaily. "I took formal possession here long ago."

"It is good of you to admit the general public," said I.

"It is only the initiated who ever really get in," she replied. "But those who are kept out do not know it."

"I wonder whether we are in?" John queried.

"At least you know it if you are not!"

"Oh! Brunt's in, fast enough," said I. "You can see that at a glance. But seriously, Miss Lamb, this is mighty fine. Can we go any farther?"

"Won't you let me go ahead?" John begged, as we put our horses in motion. "There were some places back there

where I did n't enjoy seeing you feel your way."

"Very well. I will try to be more philosophical, and to take pleasure in any perils which may threaten you. But don't try to keep in too close to the wall. There is a treacherous slant in the road."

"Thanks. I will court destruction on the outer verge. Will you engage, if I go over, to watch the catastrophe with a 'slight intensity'?"

"I will engage that you do not go over. It is not Mr. Brunt's way to go over precipices; is it, Mr. Dickson?"

"Not usually. But there might be a first time."

This part of the cañon was as wild, but not nearly as solemn as the other, and we got quite sociable again. We passed a waterfall, which made a bold plunge into a rocky basin below us. The two Lilians stopped to examine it at rather an unfortunate spot for me, as it obliged my horse to linger on an ugly shelf where his hind leg kept slipping out, and I felt myself in

danger of making a more intimate acquaintance than I wished, with said waterfall. But just as we were about to descend gracefully, hind quarters foremost, into the abysm, Miss Lamb, turning to speak to me, saw my predicament, and crying, "Go on, quick, Mr. Brunt," touched up her horse, kindly giving me another chance of life.

"Why didn't you tell us to go on?" she asked, reproachfully, when we were on safe ground again.

"I could n't be so rude," said I.

"What was the matter, Dick? Were we in your way?" asked John.

"Not in the least," I replied. "It was the wall of the cañon that was incommoding me."

I always make a point of appearing especially nonchalant when my heart is in my mouth.

The descent was just a little less exhilarating than the ride up, but altogether it was a fine trip, and when we were cantering again, three abreast, toward the

town, we all agreed that it had been a success, and that we would have another ride soon.

"Unless we disturb your *tête-à-tête*," I suggested, with a glance at the tiger-eye head and neck.

"Oh! Aunt Bessie has been telling tales," cried Miss Lamb. "It is n't often that Tiger and his mistress get a chance to play the guide—to two such appreciative tourists," she added politely.

"Dick," said John, thoughtfully, after we had left Miss Lamb at her gate, "do you think Miss Lamb would consider us models of 'transcendent integrity'?"

"My dear fellow," said I, "That was her definition of a hero. I had no idea you were so ambitious."

"I am ambitious of common honesty," he replied, with some warmth, "and I begin to feel remarkably like a pickpocket."

"Rubbish, Jack! You are all right! Don't go bothering your head about the romantic notions of a highstrung poetess and blighted being."

"I don't more than half believe that Miss Lamb is a poetess. If she is, she is an uncommonly good one, and she is not the kind of woman whom it is altogether pleasant to be playing tricks upon. Confound that novel! I wish I had never written it."

It was like Jack to confound the novel, and not his "experiment"; but I merely called his attention to the fact that, if he had not written the novel, he would never have ridden up Cheyenne Cañon with Miss Lamb—and me—and then I left him at the livery stable and went and took another look at the Bengal tiger before luncheon. In those days of dawning insecurity about John, it was always a solace to commune with the Bengal tiger. It would be such a peculiarly fitting gift if the occasion should arise, that the thought of it was superficially soothing to my gravest apprehensions.

XIII.

AN AUTO-DA-FÉ.

THE days went pleasantly by, and it began to seem so natural to be in Colorado that I could almost understand Ned Randall's preferring opulence there to penury in New York. Almost, but not quite. Every little while a Pow-wow letter would strike a chord, or an item in a New York paper would break the spell, and I would find my thoughts reverting fondly to a certain dingy old den in the midst of the hubbub, and I knew that I should be ready enough to return to my native pavingstones when the time came.

Among the letters arriving for me and my Lilian, I had almost forgotten to look for that fateful one which had caused us such embarrassment. But one evening when John and I came up from playing billiards, we found it in my room, staring us in the face. John had evidently been less oblivious of the impending crisis than I, for he was prepared for it.

"And now what are you going to do with it?" I asked, feeling that he must be quite up a tree.

"There is only one thing to do," said he, eying it distrustfully, as though he expected it to break its own seal and unfold itself to his unwilling sight; and he pulled a match out of his pocket.

"Is n't that rather a high-handed proceeding?" I asked, in some trepidation.

"Better be high-handed than underhanded," he declared, and forthwith he struck a match, lighted a corner of the envelope and put it into the empty grate. The paper turned brown and curled up a little and then the flame went out.

"Try again, Jack," said I; "the evidences of crime are not so easily disposed of."

This time the flame licked its way over to the sealing wax, which sizzled and blazed up for a moment, and then out she went again, leaving an ugly smutch in the grate.

"I say, Jack, this is grewsome. It reminds a fellow of all the detective stories he ever read. I 'll bet a dime you won't succeed in burning that all up. The infallible clue will be found lurking in a swallow's nest in the chimney, and your crime will be proclaimed from the housetops—literally."

"It is n't the right shape to burn," he muttered, without a flicker of a smile at my little sally. John has such a way of getting absorbed in what he is about that he loses a good deal! He had taken out his pocket-knife and was now gravely cutting the envelope with its contents into strips an inch wide, which he placed crosswise on top of each other

in the grate. This proved a more successful arrangement and a miniature conflagration took place. We were watching it with mingled emotions, when a rap at the door made us start like conspirators, and in walked Ned Randall.

"Good for you, fellows!" he sang out. "I thought you would n't have turned in yet. It takes an Eastern man to sit up till bedtime"; and he settled himself comfortably beneath the genial rays of the gas burner. We had up some lager, lighted our pipes, and got things quite comfortable and homelike.

Ned was turning over some books and papers on the table, when suddenly he remarked, *à propos* of nothing:

"By the way, Brunt, Mrs. Ellerton tells me that you know her niece's namesake, the author of *Spoils*."

"Yes, worse luck to it" John blurted out, "I know her."

"I suppose people bore you to death about her."

"Yes. It is an everlasting nuisance to be the confidant of a celebrity."

"I have n't much of a fancy for strong-minded women myself," Ned said soothingly, "but according to Mrs. Ellerton's account, this one must be a charmer."

"They 're all alike," growled John. Then, recovering himself: "I never knew a literary fiend who was n't more or less of a crank."

After that we got out of the breakers, and sailed away into a long talk, quite in Pow-wow style. Somewhere about midnight Ned departed, and John was about to go too, when I caught sight of a narrow strip of paper which the draught from the open door had sent fluttering across the carpet.

"The clue!" I cried, giving chase, and, as I picked it up, my eye fell upon a couple of lines written in the handwriting we had so much admired.

"Oh, I say, John! That's pretty rough on you!"

John flung his scruples to the winds, snatched the paper, and read the following blood-curdling fragment—"not but admire his beautiful self-confidence, though it———"

"Now don't you wish you had n't burned it up?" I cried, much tickled.

"Pooh!" said he, with pretended indifference. "Nobody knows whom she was writing about"; and without reading what was written on the other side of the strip, he tore the paper up into microscopic fractions.

"Perhaps it was Benny Mortimer," I suggested.

Benny was a meek little man, who blushed when he was spoken to.

"There are worse things than self-confidence," John declared, as he held the door-handle, "I wish I had a little more myself." And with this rash and startling assertion, he went off down the corridor, to his own roost.

John has his faults like the rest of us, but I had never suspected him of

being self-distrustful. No reason why he should be, as far as that goes. He has always carried everything before him. The only wonder is, that he keeps his relish for life when it goes so easily. I never realized how unspoiled he was by his invariable good luck, until I witnessed the boyish and headlong way in which he fell in love. Poor old Jack! He never does anything by halves, and much as I regretted the catastrophe I felt that I never should forgive Miss Lamb if she disappointed him.

I remember asking John once, a year or two before this, how it happened that he had never been in love.

"Bless you, Dick," he said, with that patronizing air he occasionally takes on, "what a babe you are! I've been in love lots of times." Then settling back in his leathern arm-chair, and stretching his legs comfortably, he added: "Only I could never manage to stay in long enough to make it necessary to give myself away."

I knew, however, from the beginning that this was a different matter altogether. Poor old Jack ! I could hardly sleep for thinking of the look in his eyes when he stood there with the door-handle in his hand.

XIV.

AT CROSS PURPOSES.

FOR the next few days I hardly knew Brunt. He was depressed and out of sorts, not to say out of temper. John is always rather breezy, but I never before nor since knew him to be irritable. When his friends are aggravating he laughs at them, and if other people are bothersome he turns his back, which is a good broad one.

"What's the matter, Jack?" said I, one day. "You seem out of sorts. Is it because you haven't been up Pike's

Peak according to your original programme?"

"Yes," said he, "I always hate to have heights continually before my eyes that I can't climb."

"But you might go up if you liked," said I, ready to humor him.

"Yes, and get frozen to death at the top. Thanks, it does n't tempt me."

"Did you ever hear of any one getting frozen to death up there?"

"No, but I have an idea that the summit is strewn with corpses."

It always refreshes Jack to talk in riddles, and when they are transparent enough for my comprehension, I sometimes join in. A vision of Ned and Benny frozen stiff in characteristic attitudes in the "lucidity" of a certain high altitude visited my imagination, and a sympathetic shiver accompanied it.

We were to start for New York soon after Christmas and I began to think John was likely to be poor company on the journey. He had got absurdly morbid

on the subject of that letter. I believe he tried two or three times to confess to Miss Lamb, though it went sadly against the grain. I think, myself, that a twentieth edition would have loosened his tongue; yet I must say, in justice to him, that Miss Lamb was partly responsible for his ill success. She had the most singular way of warding off confidences. I remember one occasion in particular when she turned the conversation so effectually that it would have been impossible to go on.

It was two or three days after our solemn *auto-da-fé*, and we were picnicking with a party of people at Monument Park. By rare good luck John and I had got Miss Lamb to ourselves, a little apart from the rest of the crowd, in a warm, sunny hollow, at the foot of one of those huge yellow monsters in stone with hats on their heads. Miss Lamb and I were making an amicable exchange of a very plump quail in return for a glass of claret, when she suddenly

asked me why, I supposed, Miss Lamb did not answer her letter.

"Have you had no answer yet?" I asked in feigned surprise, trying to gain time for invention.

"Not a word," she said, "and I begin to think that you were mistaken in supposing that she wanted to hear from me."

"I suppose," said I, "there must have been some error in the address, either on her part or mine."

"Miss Lamb," John began, visibly bracing himself for the effort. "I have something to tell you about the author of *Spoils*."

"Oh, please not!" she cried, in mock dismay. "I really don't want to hear anything more about her. I know just enough to make her interesting."

"But it is something I must tell you," John began again.

"Stop a minute, please. I will listen to you only on one condition. Are you sure that what you wish to tell me will not diminish my interest in her?"

"I think it will increase it," said I, anxious to help John.

"But shall I admire her as much as ever? Are you perfectly sure you would not destroy an ideal? It is so seldom that one has a full-fledged ideal to satisfy one's imagination with. Are you perfectly sure that what Mr. Brunt is going to tell me will not disturb that?"

"I am afraid it may," said the undiplomatic John, "but—"

"Then I positively refuse to listen. And would you be so kind as to get me a glass of water, Mr. Brunt? Your wine is delicious, but it does not take the place of water."

Before John returned with the water some of the other picnickers had joined our little party and the time for disclosures was past.

Very much the same thing happened on several occasions which John reported. It seemed to be a caprice of Miss Lamb's to hear nothing more about her namesake. Once, indeed, when we were call-

ing upon them and Mrs. Ellerton opened the subject, her niece interfered so resolutely, that I began to wonder whether pique had not something to do with it. Was she offended at having received no answer to her letter? Or—a sudden light burst in upon me—was she jealous of her gifted namesake. The latter suspicion I ventured to impart to John, who promptly demolished me.

"Why on earth should Miss Lamb be jealous of anybody under heaven?" he demanded. "I think you must have been reading dime novels, Dick."

"Then why won't she hear the name mentioned?"

"She is tired to death of it, as I am! Hang it all!"

As I said before, John was very unlike himself.

To make matters worse, a little thing happened about that time to stir him all up again about the authorship of the poems. Having borrowed some current magazines from Miss Lamb, we were sit-

ting one evening in my room, turning them over, when I came across a sheet of paper on which there were three verses written in pencil in Miss Lamb's hand. Considering poetry to be public property, I glanced over the verses, which rejoiced in the hilarious title of "A Plaint." They were not so harrowing as some of their predecessors, to be sure, yet they were hardly calculated to have an exhilarating effect upon John. He had about succeeded in convincing himself that the "friend" was genuine, that appearances were *not* deceitful, that the girl of his choice was *not* a blighted being. This, although there was so much evidence of the poems having been written in Colorado Springs and by some one sharing all Miss Lamb's personal interests, that he was almost driven to accept the "unenterprising" Mrs. Ellerton's authorship as the sole alternative. And here was Miss Lamb herself—no mistaking the author this time—still fondly and mournfully contemplating the fragments of a

broken heart. It would perhaps have been kinder to suppress my discovery, but such magnanimity was beyond me, and I cried:

"Look here, John. Here's a clincher! No question about this anyhow. See, she has corrected two of the lines. Dated on the 10th of December too," I went on, as he began reading the verses. "A week after our arrival. By Jove! Women are deep!"

While I was endeavoring to reconcile my memory of Miss Lamb's cheerful countenance with the graveyard phantasy I had just read, John was spending more time than seemed strictly necessary, in perusing the verses. By the time he had got through, his face looked pretty black, and he said, in a peculiar, jarring voice:

"I don't know, Dick, whether to be more proud of the way in which we have deceived Miss Lamb about ourselves, or of the manner in which we have succeeded in prying into her private affairs.

Anyhow I am going to bed. Good-night!"

He departed, carrying the paper off with him.

The next morning he asked me if I did not think we had been in Colorado about long enough, and we agreed to start for home on the 26th.

XV.

EPISODES.

THE day on which we fixed our plan for departure was the 22d, and we had promised Randall to come up to the polo ground and see the first game of the season. We were rather late in arriving, and we found a gay crowd collected at one corner of the ground. It was a mighty pretty sight. The wide, level field just out of the town, with red- and blue-capped riders tearing about after the balls, and cutting sudden and impossible angles on their stocky little ponies; the bright-colored flags flying from the

poles, and the groups of pretty turn-outs with well-dressed people looking on. There were lots of riders, too, among the spectators, so that there was no lack of life and movement outside the grounds, as these free lances passed from village-cart to buckboard, from buckboard to victoria, paying their respects to the prosperous-looking occupants. The mountains appeared very big that morning, brooding, in grandfatherly fashion, over the gambols of man and beast.

We soon discovered Miss Lamb on horseback standing near a victoria in which her aunt was seated with their neighbor Mrs. Brown, and her little two-year-old child. Benny Mortimer, also on horseback, seemed to be acting as escort, and we were about to brave Benny's blushing displeasure, by joining the party, when the baby in the victoria began to wail, at the same time putting up its little hands to Miss Lamb. As we rode nearer, Miss Lamb was saying: "Rosamund wants a ride. Why won't

you let me take her home? I was just going."

The child seemed to perceive her advantage, and her cries became more vociferous and more unintelligible than before.

"But were you really going?" asked the mother.

"Indeed I was, and am. Do let me take her. We should both enjoy it so much; and you will never be able to leave the field till the 'blues' have won."

"She is a naughty, fretful baby, but, if you want to spoil her you may. I suppose it is all a jumble to her poor little head, and she probably does not know whether her 'dee papa' is a red or a blue,"—and then with a most astounding confidence this rash mother resigned her offspring to the alarming situation proposed.

Miss Lamb reached down and lifted the child with a charming ease and grace, and then, holding her in her right arm, she walked her horse toward us, escorted

by the faithful but embarrassed Benny. The little yellow-haired midget held on to Miss Lamb's neck, her small, flushed face pressed against her protector's chin, and looked out upon the world with the light of victory in her blue eyes. The polo was exciting, at that moment, and all faces were turned toward the field; but I am sure John and I had the amazement of a great multitude in the fascinated gaze with which we met the little cavalcade.

"But, Miss Lamb, is n't that awfully risky?" I remonstrated; for I felt that it was somebody's duty to interpose for the rescue of the child.

"Not a bit!" she said. "Rosamund is a real horsewoman"; and she put Tiger into an easy lope and rode off, the baby crowing with delight, and Benny looking rather nervous as escort.

John and I desisted from our intention of visiting the victoria, and walked our horses to a point close up to the boundary, where we could follow the game better.

"I suppose that is the Rosamund of those pretty verses," said I; "they are evidently cronies."

Perhaps you remember the poem in which a certain "Baby Rosamund" is addressed as "My little crony." John once said it was a "gem."

He now sat lost in thought, instead of looking at the field, till suddenly the whole game came charging down upon us with such a thundering noise that John's horse shied almost from under him. The rider stuck fast, however, and thus recalled to his senses, had the grace to look on, as Ned himself, from out of a tremendous scuffle, sent the ball flying between the goals.

"Pretty work that!" I cried, as the applause subsided.

John assented rather vaguely and then turned his horse's head and seemed about to take French leave. I gave chase and asked where he was going. He said it was so confoundedly hot standing there in the sun that he was going for a ride.

He "had seen polo before." So had I; but I didn't propose to lose the rest of the fun, for all that; so I stayed on and had a very pleasant morning. There are lots of nice girls in Colorado Springs.

When I rode down the avenue an hour later, I was not altogether surprised to see John's horse tied to Mrs. Ellerton's hitching-post, and finding him sitting on the piazza with Miss Lamb,—in the "confoundedly hot" sun, by the way,—I thought I would go in and inquire what had been done with the remaining pieces of the baby. Before I could bring on my little joke, however, Miss Lamb, who, for the first time in our acquaintance, looked slightly agitated, was saying:

"O Mr. Dickson! please come and defend me. Mr. Brunt is accusing me of having written Leslie Smith's poems."

"And do you deny it?" I asked, filled with a burning curiosity to know the truth.

"What! You think so too?" she

cried, reproachfully, and my curiosity went out like a candle.

"I could n't be so indiscreet as to think anything about it," I said, feeling very small indeed.

"And we have no right to ask you any questions," said John, promptly mounting his high horse. "Dick, I have made an unconscionably long call. I really must be going ; but don't let me hurry you."

"Have you told Miss Lamb how soon we are going home ?" I asked, as we all stood up.

"Going home ?" she repeated, with a sudden change of countenance, and a swift glance at John.

John did not see it. He was occupied in winding the lash of his riding crop about the stick in complicated and artistic twists.

"We are going on the 26th," said I, with a penetrating look at Miss Lamb.

There was a dead silence for a second, and then Miss Lamb replied with a queer

little laugh, the queerer, because she is not the kind of girl to laugh by way of conversation.

"I don't know why I should be so surprised. I only wonder that you should have stayed as long as you have. There is so much coming and going here," she added, more easily, "that we name our fleeting visitors 'episodes.'"

"And shall you call us 'episodes'?" John inquired, letting the artistic design untwist with a snap.

"Why, we shall have to."

At that moment Mrs. Ellerton drove up to the gate.

"Bad news, Aunt Bessie," said the niece as her aunt came up the steps. "Mr. Brunt and Mr. Dickson are to join the noble army of 'episodes' on the 26th."

"Lilian! Don't be so rude! Are you really going, Mr. Dickson?"

"I am afraid we are, though we hate to."

"It must be afflicting to go back to

poor little provincial New York," said Miss Lamb. "Just think of it, Aunt Bessie! To exchange Pike's Peak Avenue for Broadway, and picnics at Monument Park for the German Opera and the Pow-wow! Is n't it the Pow-wow?"

Miss Lamb's manner as she said this was singularly out of character, but as we turned to go, she spoke like herself again, and that is always charmingly, whatever she may be saying.

"We must not forget, Mr. Dickson, that you have not yet got that book of pressed Colorado flowers for your sister. Do you remember, I told you they were done by 'a bird in a cage'? Aunt Bessie, could we not all drive to Manitou and visit the cage some day this week? Say the day after to-morrow?"

"By all means, if the gentlemen can spare the time when they are going so soon."

The gentlemen expressed themselves as delighted. What had we come to Colorado for, I should like to know!

We had taken our leave, when John turned deliberately back and said, "right out in meeting," as it were:

"I was unpardonably rude, Miss Lamb."

"I think you were," she said, with a slight shake in her voice, of some sort of emotion, I could not tell what; "and I am afraid I shall not have time to forgive you before you go."

There was a look, half-aggrieved, half-deprecating in her eyes, but she gave him her hand, and reminded us once more of the hour fixed for the drive.

I don't know how much Miss Lamb had to explain to Mrs. Ellerton, but my curiosity, at least, was aroused.

"What on earth—" I began the moment we were out of hearing.

"Oh, I was an ass. That 's all. She sat there looking so cool and self-contained that I got suddenly perfectly furious at the whole thing, and tried to break in upon her confidence. I can't tell you, for the life of me, what I said, but it was enough to show her that I knew, and when she tried

to evade me, I pulled out that confounded poem you found between the leaves of the *Atlantic*, and handed it to her with what I think must have been a perfectly devilish grin, and told her how sorry we were to seem to have pried into her affairs."

"Good heavens, John! You *were* an ass!" There are moments when one must be frank, or burst. "But go on, go on! What did she say?"

"What did she say? She *looked volumes*, but she only said, 'One can happily copy much better things than one could write'; and at that moment you rode up, and I am perfectly certain you saved my life."

"Glad to hear it, Jack. Did she seem so dangerous?"

"No, not that! I was merely withering up inside. Not a pleasant form of demise," he added, dryly.

"But, on the whole, what impression did you get?" I asked, for being of a practical turn of mind I wanted to get hold of the facts.

"I got the impression that I had better mind my own business."

I was really sorry for Jack. He had certainly made a mess of it. But I felt that it was the duty of a friend to cheer him; so I said, hopefully:

"Never mind, Jack. When you are an 'episode,' you won't care a rap about the whole affair."

To this cheerful proposition he had nothing to say; and I tried another tack.

"Don't you see?" said I, "Miss Lamb was sure to be offended in either case. Whether she wrote the poems or not, she would hate to be taxed with it, considering the 'autobiographical' ones."

"My dear Dick, when a man knows he has been an infernal idiot there is no use in proving it as though it were a point of law. Unless, of course, you think it valuable practice. In that case, just reduce me to powder without a qualm."

Upon that I returned to my first tack.

"Well," I said, "I hope you will be as glad as I shall be when we are out of

the whole muddle. I, for one, am sick of complications. I already lie awake nights, thinking how simple life in New York will seem. There, at least, one can call a spade, a spade, and if there are broken hearts lying round loose, one does not know it."

"Can't you pursue the comparison with some allusion to clubs and diamonds? The joker might certainly be worked in here."

John must indeed have been very low in his mind. With some men a pun is the natural outcome of exhilaration; the head and the heart get light together. With John, on the contrary, it was only an indication of the deepest gloom.

I gave up trying to cheer him, and turned my thoughts to Miss Lamb. Her demeanor had suggested many questions which I found myself quite unable to answer. Was she aware of John's interest? Did she reciprocate? What was the significance of that swift glance, and the ensuing pause, when I

announced the date of our departure? Why did she suddenly seem flippant? The flippancy was a mask of course. Was it assumed to hide her chagrin at being found out, or to conceal her displeasure at John's impertinence? For indeed no milder term will suffice. Was she merely afraid that we should see how sorry she was that John was going? In other words, did she like him? If she did, was he her first choice, or had she a "past," as the saying is. How fervently I now hoped that the "past" existed only in our undisciplined imaginations. I could not bear that John should break his heart over the woman who wrote the "Sonnets of Constance." Yet she must have written them. Everything went to prove it. And then I thought of her clear eye and her healthy way of looking and talking, and I was more in a mix than ever.

Yes, nothing could be more futile than such speculations, and I finally made an end of them.

XVI.

A BIRD IN A CAGE.

THE 24th was cold as Greenland, but one does not mind the thermometer in Colorado when there is no wind, and we found the double buckboard before Mrs. Ellerton's door, and the two ladies equipped for their drive. I remember how well Miss Lamb looked, dressed in the cheerful black which cannot be mistaken for mourning. I liked the little round velvet hat she wore, and she was particularly becoming to the shoulder cape of long shiny black fur which she had on. Mrs. Ellerton, who

appeared as a dimly defined but very expensive mass of sealskin, invited John to sit with her, while Miss Lamb, with a half apology to me, kept the reins herself.

"The horses are going to dance," she said, "and I am sure I shall enjoy them more than you would." The horses did dance, and Miss Lamb managed them beautifully.

"I am afraid Mr. Brunt wishes he were nearer the scene of action," said Mrs. Ellerton, as the nigh horse gave a playful kick, and the other one cocked his ears at an eccentric angle which boded mischief.

John protested, politely, and I reflected that he must have a fine view of the driver. The stinging air had heightened her color, and there was an intent look on her face, and an alertness in her eyes which must have been agreeable to look upon. I was myself debarred by my close proximity from an unrestricted contemplation thereof.

The horses afforded us a good deal of

entertainment as we bowled along, past the flourishing collection of "sample rooms" in Colorado City. There was not much talking done. As we approached Manitou it was curious to see how the mountains seemed to gather themselves together and frown at our intrusion, a sort of dumb protest which never appears to make a deep impression on any one but the writers of descriptions in prose and verse. Manitou looked wonderfully Alpine, lying in a cleft of the hills, so narrow that the village had been obliged to find room for itself by climbing up the hillsides on either hand. The big hotels were nearly all closed, and there was a Sunday-like calm in the street, but the noisy brook went rollicking through the valley, and as we got opposite the soda spring, the beginning of a huge drove of cattle emerged from the Ute Pass with deep and various lowings and bellowings. By the time we had reached "the Perch," the streets were swarming with the great beasts, accompanied by

shouting cowboys, riding scrawny but agile broncos, under whose generalship—for the ponies seemed to take the initiative in the affair—the moving mass of creatures was kept in marching order.

We stood for a moment on the little verandah, waiting for admission "The Perch" is a tiny cottage well up on a brick-red hillside, whence the peak is just visible above the enfolding hills.

The door opened and a little woman on crutches stood before us. She was Miss Willet, the presser of flowers, the friend and presumably the *protégé* of Miss Lamb. She seemed prepared for our coming, as much so as so small and frail a creature, in so tiny a room, could be prepared for an avalanche of four great hearty men and women. And we soon found that she was mistress of the situation.

"Don't sit down, Lilian," she said, in a high, bird-like treble, "don't sit down till you've fetched the tea. You must be nearly frozen. It's all ready" she added,

as Miss Lamb vanished, "but I am not fond of hobbling about in company, so Lilian waits on me."

Not exactly the tone of a *protégé* I thought, and I said:

"How pleasant it is to hear the cattle go by."

"Yes, indeed," said Miss Willet. "That is about all the music we have here in the winter. In the summer we are very gay, with our hops and Sunday concerts."

"Do you go down to the hops?" I asked.

"Dear me, no! I have n't been down the hill for three years. But the music comes up to me—which is much easier. Mahomet and the mountain you know."

John looked with a benignant smile at the minute speaker, and said: "So you are the mountain?"

"Sometimes the mountain and sometimes the squirrel, just as I please. I often think of Emerson's squirrel when I sit here, face to face with that big Pike's

Peak and crack my own little nuts. What good things you have said about Emerson, Mr. Brunt. That essay of yours was one of the most toothsome nuts I ever cracked —saving your presence."

The sort of twinkle of appreciation that accompanied this remark was delightful, and I don't think I ever saw John more pleased with a compliment.

Just at that moment Miss Lamb appeared with the tea, and he took the tray from her hands in his masterful way, and set it on the table beside Miss Willet. Then we watched our little hostess pour out tea, with dainty, bird-like motions. One was constantly reminded of Miss Lamb's "bird in a cage." She looked as though she might be thirty or forty or fifty years old; it did not matter which. She had bright dark eyes, and a peculiarly crisp enunciation; the two most noticeable things about her. After a while one observed a slightly drawn look about the mouth, but it smiled and talked so much that it was only at

rare intervals that one could surprise it at rest.

The tea warmed a body up delightfully, and the little cakes were most pleasing.

"What a famous cook you are, Miss Willet," said Mrs. Ellerton, as she tasted the cakes.

"Did you make these delectable little things yourself?" asked John.

"Who else should make them?" she demanded, with a quick turn of the head. "You don't suppose I keep a retinue of servants in this dry-goods box?"

"Would it take a retinue?"

"Lilian," said she, with apparent irrelevance. "You are the most considerate young person of my acquaintance. You never find it necessary to embellish your conversation with an account of your friends' idiosyncrasies. Now some of my very well-meaning acquaintances show me off to their friends as a sort of curiosity, as being a woman who lives quite alone, and is an extremely odd fish.

I'll warrant that Lilian has never even told you of the five cats which have lightened my solitude from time to time, only to go the way of Colorado cats as promptly as though they had an appointment to keep."

"And what is the way of Colorado cats? We don't even know that."

"A premature death. They are as rare as peacocks here. You can't induce them to live. And I won't have a dog, because he would bark if a burglar approached the house, and scare me out of my wits."

"And you really live here entirely alone?" asked Brunt, in that great, friendly, benevolent voice he has for all fragile creatures. We both thought of the wild Indians and wilder cowboys, with which our imaginations had formerly peopled Colorado. Yet, even so, the wild beasts seldom harm the birds.

"Well, not quite alone," the tiny woman was saying. "There are Gog and Magog up there"—pointing to two

monstrous rocks on the opposite mountain side,—"and there is my cuckoo-clock that little Rosamund brought me on her first birthday. And then a woman comes in for an hour every morning to tidy me up. I name them in the order of their importance. I could dispense with the woman much more lightly than with Gog and Magog, or the clock either."

We looked with interest at Gog and Magog, remembering that Leslie Smith had celebrated their "uncouth majesties." Miss Willet's talk ran on with unfailing fluency and spirit, and, withal, a quite irresistible charm. It was like firelight. It flickered from one theme to another and brightened everything it touched. John was clearly enchanted with the whole situation. He sat there looking from the "bird" to Miss Lamb and from Miss Lamb to the "bird," with such a blissful content in his face, that it seemed to me he must have a deeper source of satisfaction than the mere pleasure of listening to this bird-like chirping.

She showed us her books of pressed flowers and we longed to buy out her entire stock. But delicacy forbade, and we were obliged to content ourselves with taking two of the very largest and most expensive. I am sure that when Miss Willet told us that "Lilian" had gathered most of her flowers for her, John would have joyfully paid half his fortune for a single specimen. That, however, was happily not necessary. We do not have to pay half our fortune for the things we most desire. If we get them at all, they come as a free gift.

When we were taking leave, Miss Willet, still sitting in her chair, put her tiny hand into John's big one, and said, very warmly: "I don't suppose I shall ever see you again, Mr. Brunt, but I should like you to know that it has been a very particular gratification to me to see you to-day."

"It cannot possibly be to you what it has been to me, Miss Willet," said John, in his very deepest voice, "and I think we shall meet again."

I stood stupidly wondering at this exchange of rather ardent compliments, without an inkling of what it all meant; nor could I divine why John was in such spirits on the homeward drive. He talked so entertainingly, and with such delightful abandonment, that his companion, Mrs. Ellerton, seemed quite swept out of her usual placid indolence, and responded with an animation which I had not thought her capable of. Miss Lamb and I did more listening than talking.

To cap the climax of this exhilarating morning, we found an advance copy of Leslie Smith's poems awaiting us at the hotel. John tore open the wrapper with feverish impatience, as we walked along the corridor to our rooms, and by the time we got to his door he had taken a bird's-eye view of the entire contents.

"Is n't that a pretty bit of binding and printing?" said he, exultantly, as we shut the door behind us.

It was, indeed, all and more than our fancy had painted. Whoever might be their author, the poems of Leslie Smith

had made their début, equipped, as the newspapers say, "with every advantage the bookmaker's art could bestow."

I was still admiring them, when John, who had stood, meanwhile, fairly fuming with impatience, cried: "And now we know who wrote them!"

"Has she confessed?" I asked, looking up from my favorite *Knighted.*

"Confessed? No. But there can't be any doubt about it. Everything goes to prove it. 'Gog and Magog,' 'Solitude,' 'The Cripple's Cup.' I tell you that 'Cripple's Cup' is an inside view."

"Good gracious, Jack!" said I. "You don't think the 'bird in the cage' wrote them?"

"If she didn't, nobody did! Why it was all in her eye as plain as print."

"What was in her eye, Jack? Do talk sense."

"The inspired ones, the best ones; and the melancholy ones were in the corners of her mouth; and the witty ones were in the cut of her nose; and the de-

scriptive ones in her whole environment; and the philosophy was in her crutches!"

I did not propose to be convinced by such random talk as this, but somehow I began to feel as though I had made the discovery all on my own account.

"How are you going to make sure?" I asked.

"This is how I am going to make sure," and John sat down, and scribbled off these few lines:

"My Dear Miss Lamb:

"An advance copy of the poems of Leslie Smith has just arrived. Could we not take them to her this afternoon? You were intending to ride, were you not?

"Yours,

"John Brunt."

In half an hour the answer came:

"My Dear Mr. Brunt:

"I saw you had guessed our secret. The days are very short. We must start by two o'clock.

"Yours very sincerely,

"Lilian Leslie Lamb."

At two o'clock they were off and I was left to chew the cud of my reflections. These were not altogether soothing. I felt perfectly sure now that sooner or later John would take the plunge, and I felt for him. Such an awkward thing to do under the most favorable circumstances, and who could tell how Miss Lamb would like it after such a very short acquaintance. She did not impress me as a girl who would say "Yes, thank you" as a matter of course just because John was a distinguished man and a fine fellow, and I could not form any surmise as to the state of her feelings toward him. I did not think she was indifferent to him; no intelligent person ever was, to my knowledge; but from indifference to "for better, for worse," is a far cry. I recalled what Ned Randall had said about her "lucidity," and that was some little comfort. Yet, on the whole, I was not sure that John was the man to be deterred by "lucidity," unless it were very marked indeed. He had not Ned's vanity to

cause him to shrink from a rebuff, nor Benny Mortimer's excessive modesty to make him self-distrustful. He would survive a rejection, of course. It would take more than that to demolish John, or at least I hoped so, but it would be rough, and I could n't bear to think of it.

Then I imagined her saying yes, and that was about as bad as the other.

"O Lord!" I caught myself saying. "Why need she have been such a provoking paragon? What did she want to go and do all those charming things for? Was it not enough that she should write such uncommonly good letters, and drag us out by them to this fatal place, without being so unnecessarily good-looking, and riding so absurdly well, and talking just after John's own heart, and being, altogether, I verily believe, the one woman on this planet whom John would lose his head over?"

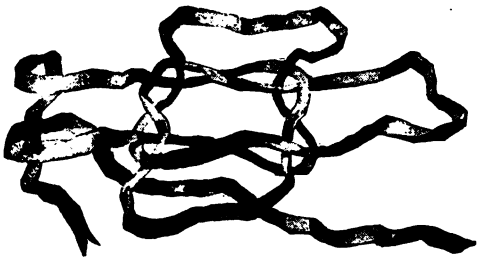
My mind reverted to the grace and sweetness with which she picked up that

picturesque infant at the Polo Ground and rode off with it; to the manner in which she poked the fire the first evening of our acquaintance, letting the flame light up her face; to her firm hand and quick eye as she drove those prancing steeds to Manitou. All seemed like so many wanton shots let fly without regard to the mischief they might do. And of course it was her perfect unconsciousness which rendered them fatal. I actually felt a grudge against her for having tumbled out of the apple tree at the age of seven, and for having so politely thanked her torturer for his services. I remembered with a shudder a remark John made one day when we first came to Colorado, and I was harping on the old string of Leslie Smith's identity.

"I don't care whether Miss Lamb writes poetry or not," John had suddenly declared. "She is a better poem herself than any I ever read."

Yes, John was in for it, that was sure as sunrise, and as I could n't make up my

mind which would be my choice of two evils, I went forth and paid some duty calls, thanking my stars that all girls were not so exasperatingly admirable as this one.



XVII.

ON HORSEBACK!

WHEN I got home, long after dark, I found John striding up and down my room in a blaze of glory from all the gas-burners, every one of which he had lighted up, for some reason best known to himself.

"Hullo!" said I. "Got back?"

To which original greeting he responded by wringing my hand unmercifully.

"Good heavens, Jack!" I groaned, partly from physical anguish, partly from

the shock of a tremendous conviction. "You don't want *my* hand."

He dropped it, and then he laughed, that splendid old laugh of his that would make a raven smile.

"Dick, you blessed youngster," said he, "are n't you going to congratulate me?"

"John Brunt," said I, "you have n't done the deed?"

He says my voice was awe-struck, but I know better. Awe was not the emotion I felt at the moment.

"Yes, Dick," he said, with a sudden solemnity, "she has accepted me."

"What! *On horseback?*" I cried, for that circumstance was really the first thing that struck me.

"Yes, on horseback," he admitted, and then he laughed again.

I did not press for details. In fact I was too much taken aback at first to ask any more questions, and I found John more inclined to talk of the earlier part of the trip. He gave a comical account of little

Miss Willet's consternation when she found that her secret was out. But John swore himself and me also to secrecy, and bye and bye she thawed out and let him see her joy in the book, which she handled in a caressing way that told her story better than words.

On their way home he seems to have confessed to his companion how he had tormented himself with the question of the authorship, and that was sure to bring about a declaration, as anybody could see.

They rode in over the lower Mesa. It was getting dark, and was so cold that they rode fast. I can imagine how the hoof beats chimed in with John's impetuous words, and if Miss Lamb is the woman I take her for, her own pulse must have kept time with both.

XVIII.

A TOAST.

IT was a glorious Christmas morning and Pike's Peak was in his grandest mood, glittering white in the sunshine, with warm dark shadows in the deep ravines.

We stood, paying homage to the splendid old fellow, on our way to the breakfast-room, and I gave John's hand a good hard grip by way of apology for my somewhat incomplete congratulations of the night before.

"Is n't it glorious!" he said, with an air of including life in general in his encomium.

"You like Pike's Peak better than you did at first," I remarked.

"Like it? I adore it."

"All in three weeks," I murmured, ruefully.

"All in three weeks!"

His tone was positively jubilant, and I could not but admire him. A man who can keep up his spirits at such a time must have a lot of grit.

"Have you told her about the other Lilian?" I asked.

His face fell, and I fancied he was thinking of the twentieth edition. Only nineteen had yet appeared.

"No. I meant to, but it did n't come in naturally."

"You 'll have to tell her before long, you know."

"Dick, I wonder how she will take it."

"Poh! she will be pleased as Punch, I

warrant you. But I wish I might be there to see her surprise."

The two Lilians were to ride again that morning. John was polite but not urgent in inviting me to accompany them. But we were both bidden to dinner, and I felt that I could curb my impatience till then.

In the course of the morning, however, I paid my respects to Mrs. Ellerton, who seemed to be taking it very philosophically. Women have so much nerve in an emergency. To be sure, Mrs. Ellerton had come to like John very well, especially after she learned that his mother was a Van Deusenberg. As for me, it would not have reconciled me in the least degree if Miss Lamb's mother had been the Empress of Madagascar. I often wonder if women care as much about things as men do.

Just before we started out to dine at Mrs. Ellerton's John received a letter from the Sandersons. He opened it and read it with a grunt of satisfaction.

"What pleases you, Jack?" I asked.

"The twentieth edition," said he. "I always meant to tell when the twentieth edition was out."

"I do believe," said I, as we walked up the avenue, "I do believe that you are perfectly easy in your mind about the whole thing since you have gained your point."

"Perhaps you are right, Dick," said he. "I suddenly feel as though I had been a fool to worry about it. I am sure Miss Lamb will understand everything perfectly. I say, Dick, why did n't you tell me what a fool I was?"

"I did n't find you susceptible to hints in that direction, and one does n't want to be brutal. But, look here, Jack. She may forgive you, but what will she think of me for making her write that letter?"

"Oh, she won't resent anything *you* have done!"

This was more consolatory than flattering.

"I should like to be by when the cur-

tain goes up," I said, meekly overlooking the snub.

"Perhaps you may be. I don't mind if you give it a hoist yourself."

The two ladies met us in the hall just as they did the first evening we dined there. Miss Lamb had on a gown of some sort of lacy black stuff that was very becoming. She wore some roses, which, together with her brilliant face, lighted things up finely. I don't mean that her color was brilliant. It was more the look. I thought of the star John once compared it to. He evidently was not so far afield in that comparison as lovers usually are. Somehow I found myself with a very warm feeling toward Miss Lamb, in spite of my personal grievance, and I had a much easier time with my congratulations than I had anticipated.

I never saw a newly engaged couple carry it off better than did those two. They seemed to take it for granted in such a comfortable way, yet there was no

mistaking them. Their state of mind, though unobtrusive, was clearly beatific. After all, one must be a monster of selfishness, not to rejoice in the happiness of one's best friend, however misguided he may be. Besides which, there was the Bengal tiger in the background. That was a justification such as few weddings have.

Once more John took Mrs. Ellerton in to dinner, and I Miss Lamb, and the similarity of the situation, together with the stupendous changes, made it really bewildering. Once more Mrs. Ellerton opened the subject of the mysterious author of *Spoils*, and this time her niece attempted no diversion.

"You must write to Miss Lamb soon," said the elder lady, beaming at her niece over a great dish of roses. "She will be so interested in everything."

Miss Lamb looked across at her aunt with a singular smile and said: "There is no use in writing to her, Aunt Bessie, I have reason to think she does not read my letters."

"Does not read your letters?" Aunt Bessie repeated, in an incredulous tone of voice, while John and I looked at each other. I don't know how he felt, but a cold shiver ran down my back. It is one thing to confess, and quite another thing to be found out.

John retained his self-possession and said: "The author of *Spoils* was resolved, long ago, to reveal his identity whenever the twentieth edition should be out. The twentieth edition was out yesterday."

"Then we may congratulate you now?" said Miss Lamb, with a delicious turn of the head, and a brimming sort of smile. "I have long wanted to."

This time John flushed, and Mrs. Ellerton looked more mystified than ever.

"What is it all about, Lilian?" she asked. "Are you in the secret?"

"Yes, Aunt Bessie. I have been in the secret for more than three weeks. Is it possible that you did not recognize Mr. Brunt's description that first evening?

You said yourself that it was strangely unlike a middle-aged authoress."

The champagne had just been served, and without waiting for explanations I proposed a toast.

Within, the roses and the candle-light and the sparkling wine adorned the feast, but it was of Pike's Peak I was thinking,—of Pike's Peak wrapped in snow, towering big and benignant in the starlight, as we gaily drank to the health of "the two Lilians."

THE END.