



*Love Letters
of a
Conquistador*

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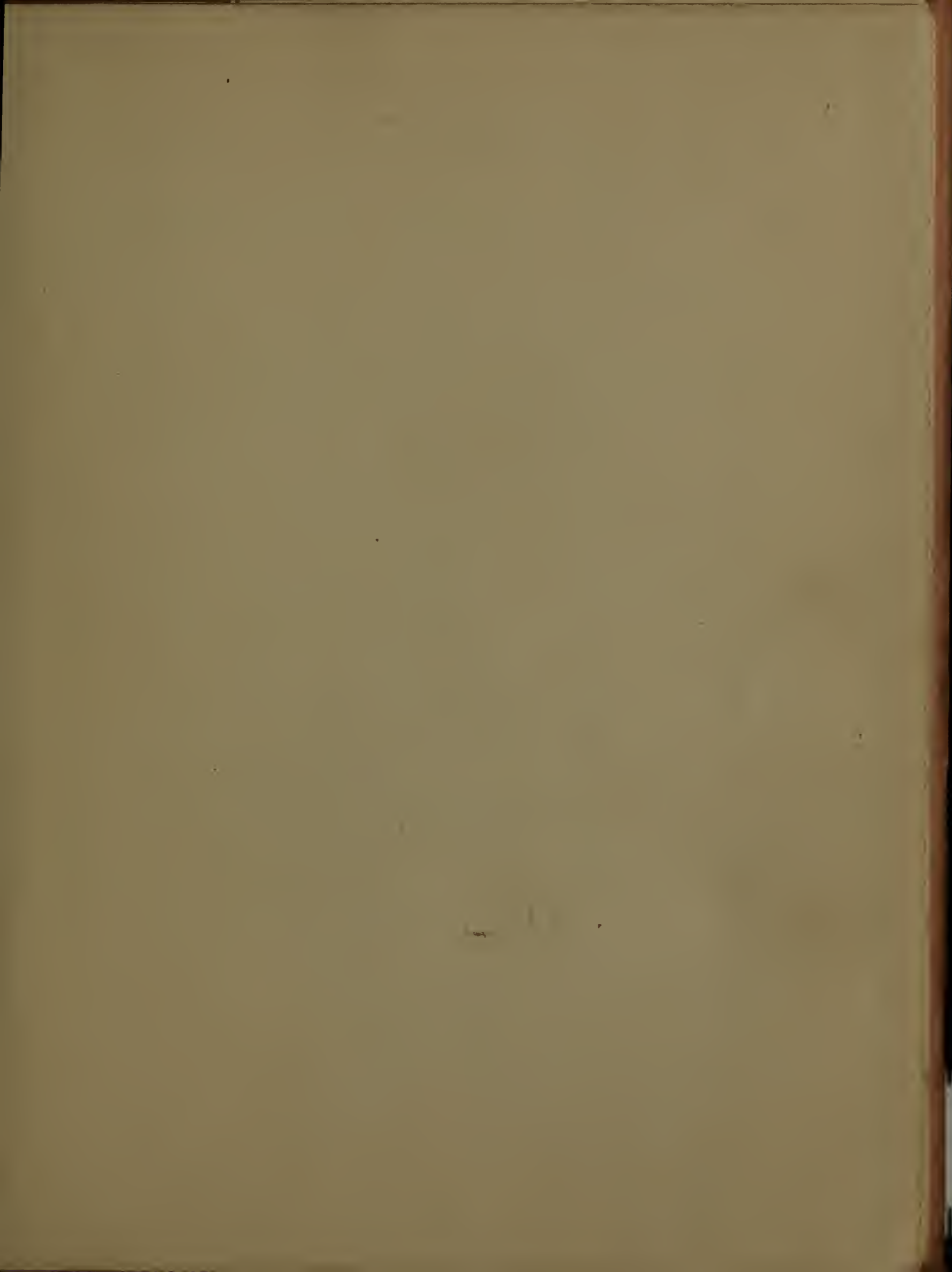


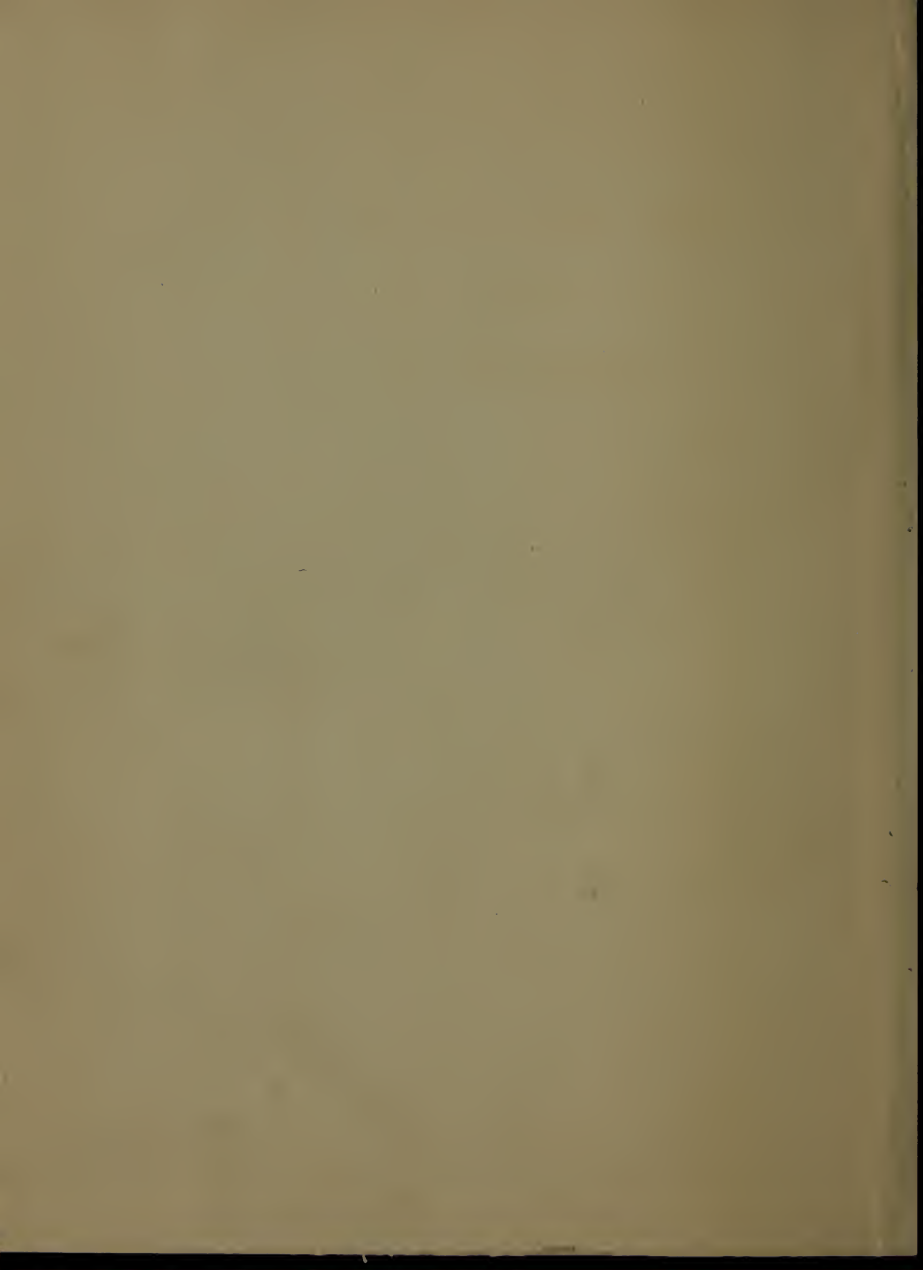
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The Love Letters
of a
Coquette

♠

BY

WARREN A. HAWLEY

♠

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*“There is no other call
From wind to wave, from rose
to asphodel,
Than Love’s alone—the thing
we cannot quell,
Do what we will, from font to
funeral.”*



PROLOGUE

It was the twilight of a perfect day in the year 189—, wooed by the perfume of summer, I left my abode to saunter along the border of an adjacent lake. At that hour, a peaceful quiet reigned. The crescent of a new moon spread a silvery mantle over the ground, while softer rays of the earlier stars twinkled through the rifts in the drifting clouds. The hills loomed

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indistinctly in the dusk and divided the cool calm of approaching night from the fleeing warmth of a waning day.

The never-dying poetry of earth once more stood revealed in all the freshness of immortal youth. Under the influence of such an environment, my thoughts floated tranquilly—carried hither and thither by the tide of recollection—over the vast ocean of the past.

I scarcely felt the slight im-

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pact of my foot against an object lying in the pathway. I stooped and picked up a packet of letters. They were addressed to a man in a characteristically feminine hand. Confident that the owner would discover his loss and retrace his steps, I threw myself upon the green sward beside the path and contemplated the hills beyond the lake until the last faint tint of the day was gone. Nothing disturbed the solitude. I returned to my

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lodging with the packet in my hand.

The following morning, I learned that a party of merry-makers, returning from some festivity, had found, near the spot where I had rested, the body of a young man half submerged in the lake. Until then, I had scarcely thought of the letters. From that instant, however, they and the dead man became associated in my mind; that they belonged to him, I felt convinced. I read them

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with intense interest, thinking to find a motive for the untimely death. A short while afterward, I was told that a young woman, one of the merriest of that merry party, had suffered much from the horror of seeing and recognizing the ghastly face of the man to whom she was betrothed.

That woman was Claire Vaughn. One of the witnesses to the scene added what might be considered a significant incident. Miss Vaughn's special

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companion in the party, whom my informant characterized as a tall, foreign-looking man of striking appearance, had been among those who had pressed forward to remove the corpse from the water. As the features were upturned to the moonlight, this man had given an involuntary start, which almost caused him to release his grasp upon the dripping clothes of the dead man. At the same instant, he had uttered a smothered cry.

PROLOGUE

“My God! It’s Harry Yarnall!”

Even in the agony of her own grief, Miss Vaughn had seen the movement and heard the cry. When she had recovered from the first shock, she had turned upon her companion, and in a low but piercing voice had asked:

“What do you know about Harry? He never told me that he knew you.”

The man’s reply was inaudible to my informant. He

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appeared ill at ease. It would seem, however, that he was seeking to explain. Suddenly, a wild light shot from the eyes of the unhappy woman. With a gasp, she had cried:

“Your name is not George Bradley; you are—” The next moment she had fallen in a deep swoon.

These circumstances made such an impression upon me that I found myself pondering over what possible combination of events could have induced

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the young man to take his life. Perhaps he had seen Miss Vaughn drive by with the one man that he did not expect to see, and, if so, was not that man a traitor to him? Perhaps they had kissed, and the light in her eyes had damned the love in Harry Yarnall's heart; perhaps her companion was the cynic whom he had made his confidant. Perhaps—

But why continue conjectures which the reader, when he

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is in possession of all the facts, can offer as intelligently as myself?

I read and re-read the letters; they haunted me. Something within compelled me to formulate a series of letters from the young man, the details of which might have caused the replies still remaining in my possession. How well I have done this, the reader may determine.

W. A. H.

THE LOVE LETTERS
OF A COQUETTE

DEAR CLAIRE:

I reached New York safely, after having spent the usual disagreeable night on the train; it is needless to say that I did not sleep. Why? Because, dear, all the old unrest returned. When with you, listening to your words, looking into your eyes, I accepted all

that you told me in perfect faith; out of your presence, however, I am again afloat on a sea of doubts and misgivings.

My reason tells me that an affianced bride should not permit another man to kiss her. One so clever as you are should have been aware of what was coming; in fact, under the circumstances, the woman does not live whose intuition would have been at fault. When a man wishes to kiss a girl, some-

thing warns her of the contemplated act in ample time, and with the same unerring conviction as your Aunt Hetty's rheumatism forbodes a change of weather. Therefore, since you tell me that you did not anticipate it, your failure to do so suggests anything but a compliment to a prominent characteristic of your sex.

Of course, I am quite sure of your love. Nevertheless, this miserable affair hurts, because I have pleased myself

with the thought that the Creator made those sweet lips for me alone. It seems to me to be a profanation of our love, in so far forgetting me,—or at least, in temporarily casting me adrift, for the pleasure of a casual evening's entertainment in which there is an element of doubtful propriety.

Moreover, the man did not get up and kiss you with the semblance of one who, at that instant, suddenly remembered that he had forgotten some-

OF A COQUETTE

thing. He would have been a loon to have done that, and most girls would have boxed his ears soundly for his stupidity rather than for his impertinence. No, he did not act so idiotically. Therefore, the conversation must have become far more personal, to put it mildly, than you are willing to concede.

After many questions on my part, you reluctantly admitted that you "gave him just a little peck" in return, hastening to

add that it was not at all as you kissed me. That fact consoles me somewhat; indeed, it is an intense relief; but why the necessity for the "little peck" as you express it?

No, dear, it is wrong, and it makes me apprehensive lest you do not love me as fondly or as deeply as I would wish.

In reflecting upon the incidents of our summer at Cape May, last year, I call to mind my protest regarding the pin which belonged to your former

fiancé, Mr. Gay. I told you then that its return would engender a false idea, and possibly revive an old story, but, you insisted upon sending it back with a formal note. To this, I finally gave a tacit consent, though feeling that on the slightest provocation—a look, a few words of explanation, the love for Harry Yarnall might be supplanted by the earlier attachment for Paul Gay.

I do not mean to doubt you;

I love you as no man has ever loved before. You are the idol of my heart, but I do not want to spend half my time in picking up the chips that are unconcernedly knocked off by every vandal in the town.

Further, the man who kisses you, knowing of your engagement, has no respect for you. He makes his *adieux* chuckling to himself, retails the story of the *bonnebouche* to his chums and, behold! each idiot appears in turn with puckered lips and

OF A COQUETTE

tender hopes, all of which may be sweet unction to your ardent soul, but, the mere thought of it is gall and wormwood to me.

Please promise to think more of me than such careless conduct would seem to indicate; and now, sweetheart, I must leave you. I have an engagement at the club. With all your frivolous tendencies, you are a dear, sweet girl, and I love you with all my heart. I send you a paper kiss, and of

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a truth I wish that it could
be real rather than written.

Ever your devoted

HARRY.

II

DEARIE :

Always after you leave me, I am desolate—a sense of utter loneliness creeps into my heart. I miss your tenderness. Yesterday seems far away, and tomorrow so dim that I cannot even see its outline. Each day follows its predecessor with exactitude and monotony, and were it not for an occasional outing, I should die of *ennui*. As it is, my life seems reduced

to a homely state of prosy
vegetation. My nature craves
more of excitement than is in-
dicated in Larned's lines:—

“To you whose temperate pulses
flow
With measured beat serene and
slow.”

Later: Your letter has ar-
rived, and was for the most
part horrid. I have concealed
nothing from you. I cannot
see why you are not satisfied
with my explanation of that
silly *affaire d'amour*. I cannot

help it that men like me. To be the object of unusual attention, appeals to every girl's vanity, especially so, when that attention comes from a handsome man, and you must admit that Charlie is handsome.

You say that God gave you my lips. You did not discover that interesting fact until you had tried them and had found them good. Surely you ought not to blame others for assiduously laboring to ascer-

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tain the lips that were predestined for them. I have no doubt that you did a tremendous amount of sampling in your quest for what the Lord intended should ultimately belong to you.

But, seriously, I know what you will say; that Charlie knew that I was engaged to you. How should he? I never told him; he might not. No girl, with any delicacy of feeling, would voluntarily assume the *rôle* of an old-time

OF A COQUETTE

town crier and shout the news of her engagement through the highways. It is bad enough when it is "announced." If I refused to accept the attention offered me, I should have a dull time indeed. As you know, it is impossible for us to be together more than once in many moons, and you are very unreasonable to intimate that I should lock myself up and play the recluse. I am too young, and love admiration too much to

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make even a temporary convent of my habitat.

I have told you, sweetheart, that I love you. That I fancied Paul Gay, and perhaps two or three others previously, has nothing to do with the present state of my heart. Those affairs were simply experiences. You, as a man of the world, should know that a *grande passion* is rarely awakened by him who causes the first fluttering of a maiden's heart. I did not answer Paul's letter con-

OF A COQUETTE

cerning the pin, and have felt rather mean in consequence. I tried to please you, and now because some man appears,—a man whom I have known since childhood, whom I have always liked, and because *bon grè mal grè* I am kissed, you resent it. I do not like a check-rein; I chafe under it. Once in so often, I must feel free to follow the trend of my inclinations. If you do not like it, Mr. Would-be-Jailer, I am sorry. I give you the best

of my heart; all of my love; more than this, I cannot do.

Oh! please, Harry, be sensible. If I were always near, you would feel very differently, but our being so far apart destroys that *entente cordiale*, born of proximity—that oneness we so love—even in the matter of chairs. However, I promise to conform more closely to what you wish, dear heart, so pick up the pieces of your idol—readjust them, and

OF A COQUETTE

I will make a frantic effort to keep them together.

Dear me! how terribly ugly I must appear to you, all chipped and disfigured. If you were not so skillful in preserving your idol intact, I should soon resemble one of those dirty marble relics in the Louvre over which people rave so madly. *N'est-ce pas?*

By the way, a Mr. George Bradley has invited me to go canoeing with him Saturday of next week. You have never

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met him. He proposes to paddle up to Shriner's for supper, then to drift down stream in the moonlight. I must leave you now; callers have arrived.

Please, dear, do not be cross. Your letter was anything but *gallant* in some places, and positively rude in others. But then, it pleased me, because, did you really not love me you would not care.

With the tenderest of kisses,

Your own

CLAIRE.

III

DEAR CLAIRE:

If you have "to feel free to follow the trend of your inclinations once in so often," your love for me is not what it should be. Your letter has hurt me very much. As you know, I am extremely sensitive; therefore, jesting is unkind. I have no intention of using a "check-rein" to any greater extent than would

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seem consistent with circumstances as I view them. You evade the real issue when you condone Charlie Stratton's offense, and you do not appear conscious of the license granted when such an act as his is not resented.

I prefer that you do not go canoeing with Mr. Bradley. You said nothing of him while I was with you. Who is he? and where did you meet him?

I love you.

HARRY.

IV

DEAR CLAIRE:

Why have you not written? Are you ill? I am sorry that I wrote so peevishly last week. I can only furnish the excuse that your letter annoyed me. It seemed as though you were making sport of all my seriousness. Forgive me, and I will promise not to write another unkind word. I love you dearly, although I am very blue and unhappy.

Perhaps I should not have said what I did about "following the trend of your inclinations." I could not avoid doing so; your letter made me cross.

I fancied myself mistaken in you—even doubted your loyalty, and now confess that I had thought seriously of breaking our engagement; but I could not. Then I tried to find a logical cause for your seeming flippancy; I must admit that my search was

quite vain. You acted upon my advice, I hope, and refrained from going to Shriner's with Mr. Bradley, who, by the way, must be a very recent addition to your list of admirers. Please, let me hear from you, I am hungry for a sweet word.

Ever your own

HARRY.

V

DEAREST CLAIRE:

I am a prey to utter despair. You are not ill, I know, because I met Charlie Stratton on the street yesterday, and he told me that you were quite well. I was not altogether cordial, I suppose, for I hate him for that kiss. My imagination has run riot. I have fancied that that one was only a type of many, and

your confession a sort of general one, made to cover all the osculatory favors bestowed on the aforesaid individual. Perhaps this is what you mean by following "the trend of your inclinations" occasionally.

The contemplated canoe trip with that man Bradley is, I presume, a variant of this irresistible propensity — the Lord only knows what form it will assume next.

Sometimes in their lives, I suppose that all girls do fool-

ish things, and after escaping a few of them without serious consequences, they acquire confidence and a certain amount of taste for adventure. I suppose, too, that in time it becomes fascinating—this walking on thin ice. Personally, I prefer solid ground—and you should respect my wishes.

But there! I shall cease complaining. If I continue, I fear that you will despise me. I am conscious of being in an unenviable position, having a

vague idea that you are disappointed in me, and yet, my love is very strong and absorbs my whole nature. There is nothing that I would not do for you. Therefore, please, darling, be kind to me; restrain this impulsiveness; consider the fact that soon you will be called upon to adhere strictly to the conventions, and respect the restrictions that are imposed by society upon married women.

If our wedded life is to be a

happy one, you must renounce the frivolity which now seems to absorb your thoughts. To that end, if it will help you, let us be married this fall. My income would scarcely justify the step, nevertheless I am willing to make all kinds of sacrifices for so sweet a reward.

Now, dear, please—please write to me! Forgive me for distressing you. I could not help it. I am very miserable. You know that I love you beyond words, or I would not be

OF A COQUETTE

so insistent. Oh, if we could only see each other, these little differences would not arise.

With a kiss, always your
own

HARRY.

P. S.—I sincerely hope that you followed my suggestion about the canoe trip.

H.

VI

MY OWN DARLING:

This punishment is more than I can bear. Do write, tell me that I am forgiven, and I will be your slave—yes, your abject slave for life. Your silence is torture—worse than death.

If you should tell me that we must part, I could possibly find courage and manliness enough to stifle my sorrow and

OF A COQUETTE

hide it from the world—but
this uncertainty and suspense
are simply terrible.

Oh, darling, pity me!

Ever your disconsolate

HARRY.

VII

DEAR HARRY :

Nothing but a keen sense of your unhappiness prompts me to write, and if you expect forgiveness, you must stop doubting me, and fretting yourself to a point bordering upon nervous prostration.

Men are such unreasonable creatures—I am distinctly provoked with you. Of course, I went to Shriner's with George

OF A COQUETTE

Bradley. He is not an *enfant terrible*, he was extremely affable, and I had a lovely time. I cannot write more now, for he is here, and we are going for a drive.

With a kiss, which you do not deserve,

As ever, yours,

CLAIRE.

VIII

DEAR CLAIRE:

It seems to me that this fellow Bradley is altogether too attentive. Whether by accident or design, you hang me in mid-air, and my curiosity, thus suspended, is frantically grabbing everywhere in the hope of finding some object upon which to rest.

You do not write a solitary word of interest to me, except

that you went to Shriner's with him after I had requested you not to do so. Moreover, in your letter, you were obviously preoccupied. It read very much as though it were undertaken as an unpleasant duty, notwithstanding the fact that you have apparently forgiven me.

No man burdens himself with a girl for six or seven hours, unless he is extraordinarily interested in her. Conversely, six or seven hours of

one man would bore most girls to death. Since you voluntarily spent that length of time together, it is fair to assume that he was interested, and that you were not bored to death. He probably became quite personal, and sought your favor with all the fulsomeness of a miserable sycophant.

It takes a strong mind to discern, and some will-power to avoid, the snares of an adroit flatterer. There are many who are caught, but among clever

women there are none. They can control any situation. There are still others who see the danger, but who prefer to drift, as it were, until a *contre-temps* is imminent. You are quite capable of being one who would never be guilty of a *faux pas*, but alas! the old doubts assail me, and I fear, I know not what.

Now tell me—did Bradley kiss you? Pshaw! Of course he tried. I am a fool to hope that he did not make the effort,

and I fear that you let him succeed. This is the seventh experience that you have had in the short time in which we have been engaged. If you permitted him to kiss you, Claire, all is ended between us. My self-respect will not allow me to tolerate the situation any longer. At times, I think that you are possessed with a spirit of mischief, and take the keenest pleasure in relating incidents that irritate me. I cannot stand these

doubts and uncertainties. I would be perfectly happy if, under given conditions, I could invariably depend upon your acting in a certain way.

I am not especially jealous of this man. I think that you see too much of him. Of course, you have not told him that we are engaged. Please do not worry me. I cannot bear it.

Your own

HARRY.

IX

DEAR HARRY :

Once and for all time, let me give you to understand, that if you ever expect me to marry you, quit being an idiot. Not jealous! well, you have played the good Samaritan with a foundling, nursed it, cuddled it, and in a miraculously short period you have reared a monster, green-eyed and horrible, a veritable Gorgon, but alas!

you have not manifested any of the traits of Perseus.

I will not longer endure your mean insinuations. I have told you that life here is dull, and that when there comes an opportunity for some diversion, some break in the irksome uniformity of the domestic calendar, I shall always take advantage of it. You appear to miss the first requisite of duty to me as your *fiancée*, that of confidence. If you are to have a spasm every time

that I set foot abroad, we might as well end our engagement now. No, I will have no more of it, so take warning.

I am going to have a good time while I may. Rest assured, that under no circumstances will I forget my self-respect, nor is there the slightest danger of my becoming *déclassée*. After I am married, which will not be next fall, for many reasons, it will be quite time for me to settle down and

OF A COQUETTE

be as sedate as pleases you. Just fancy me, me as Mrs. Henry Yarnall, demure, painfully proper, economical, making my own clothes out of six yards of material, instead of seventeen or twenty, warming your slippers, reading cook-books, going to bed at nine o'clock from sheer lack of better occupation. Oh! no, Harry,—it is too funny. I am not as yet sufficiently weary of my present state. Dear, you are sometimes delicious.

Yesterday was class-day at the University, and a party of us drove over there. Strange as it may seem, I had never attended one of those intellectual functions. It was most impressive. I fancied all manner of strange things. You could imagine the trees and bushes all laden with the fruits of knowledge. Verily, a tall poplar was unquestionably bearing axioms and corollaries. The atmosphere was permeated with learning of every descrip-

tion. Even the grass on the campus smacked of mathematics, and I never felt so utterly ignorant in all my life.

George was untiring in his efforts to show me the buildings, explained everything, and was altogether most kind. He told me that this University is his *Alma Mater*. He was stroke in the '87 'varsity crew.

We had a very fine lunch under the trees, and while resting there, *pour passer le temps*,

he recited a little poem. Here
it is:

“Beneath a shady tree they sat,
He held her hand,
She held his hat.
I held my breath
And lay right flat.
They kissed; I saw them do it.
He held that kissing was no crime,
She held her head up every time.
I held my peace
And wrote this rhyme,
And they thought no one knew it.”

Isn't that cunning? I think
that it is awfully clever.

OF A COQUETTE

But *revenons à nos moutons*, I am looking forward to the time when you can come up here. I think that you need me to soothe your perturbed spirits, and kiss away the fancied hurts.

Will you not make a special effort to come Saturday, week after next, and stay until Sunday night? I have so much to tell you, and I long to be petted and caressed. You are such a dear, big man. I cannot explain it exactly, but your size

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seems to reduce me to a very meek little me. But I do not mind it; the process is lovely. There is nothing quite so dear as cuddling up to you, and having your arms around me.

Charlie Stratton called last night, and I know that you will be proud of me—he did not kiss me. We talked of everything under the sun, and finally, because he bored me, I sent him home. I was dead tired after our long drive to the University.

OF A COQUETTE

And now, dearie, I must
bring this letter to a close, for
I have several errands to do,
and one or two calls to return.

With a tender kiss,
Always your own,

CLAIRE.

X

DEAREST CLAIRE :

I have taken the contents of your letter to heart, and I am sorry for all that I have said, not to mention the insinuations. I cannot blame you for being cross, I certainly have deserved it. I suddenly realized that, had I long continued in the frame of mind which has lately possessed me, I should have lost you,

OF A COQUETTE

and my fond hopes of happiness would have been dispelled indeed.

Therefore, I humbly apologize, and will make a determined effort to free my mind from the unhealthy atmosphere into which it has been allowed to drift.

I will frankly tell you the cause. For some time past, I have been intimate with a man, whose very appearance is cynicism itself. He scoffs at sincerity in women, reviles all that

is good in the world, believes in no future, defies God, man, and the devil. A good conversationalist, full of interesting anecdotes, having traveled much, he was, from the first, attractive and magnetic. So much so, that from time to time, I gave him my confidences, even told him of you and of all my hopes for the future. He appeared kind, and unusually interested in all that I said of you. For the moment, his cynicism disap-

peared. The insidiousness of his influence escaped my notice. It was not until I received your last letter that I fully realized how far his ideas had taken possession of my mind and dominated all my thoughts.

In the future, I shall avoid him as much as possible, although to do that may have serious consequences, for he has been of great assistance to me in many ways; notwithstanding that, however, I shall

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endeavor to adhere to my determination.

Therefore, darling, forgive my unkindness, and all the mean things that I have not only written, but which I have also thought. I have been cowardly about it. I would not have dared to say them, for, one injured look from your sweet eyes would have made me feel miserably ashamed.

There is some good in me, I hope. Under your sweet and

gentle guidance, I could be made a worthy man; certainly, one who would always respect himself. I am sorely afraid that I do not do so now.

Be patient and loving, dear one, and in the course of time, I trust that I shall have eradicated the pernicious germs which, no doubt, would have ruined what little virtue I may now possess.

I feel an intense relief at the thought of having unburdened my soul to you, and am far

happier than I have been in months. My love for you radiates throughout my entire nature, and there is a sunshine in my heart which makes it glad and warm. Therefore, if you can forgive the unhappiness which I have caused you, tell me so, and then my cup of joy will be truly full and overflowing.

I am sorry that I cannot come to you week after next.

Always your devoted

HARRY.

XI

HARRY DEAR:

I hate that man, and I hope that you will have nothing further to do with him. Such an individual is a curse to humanity. The harm that such as he can do may never be estimated.

I forgive you dear, freely, and lovingly. I fully comprehend, and admire your courage in frankly telling me the truth.

THE LOVE LETTERS

It cost you some effort, and the mere fact of your having laid your heart bare has caused me to love you more than ever.

As I asked you in my last letter, do come up here and we will talk the matter over—then forget it, except in so far as it helped to bind our hearts more firmly together. You say that you cannot come next week. I suppose that you would scarcely have time to make the necessary preparation. Apart

from that, I have accepted an invitation to go to a *fête champêtre* at the Red Rose Inn, on Saturday night of that week. It is sure to be a jolly affair, and I am anticipating it with great glee. George Bradley and I, are going to drive there by way of the Lake Road. I suppose that it will be quite late when we return. I wish that you could be there, but I could not go with you after having accepted George's invitation.

THE LOVE LETTERS

Once again, dear, your letter was the sweetest one that you ever wrote me, and I love you most devotedly and fondly. I am famishing for a sight of your dear face.

Always your own

CLAIRE.

XII

DEAR CLAIRE:

Your letter was most acceptable. I appreciate your tender heart, only I wish that you would write me more of what you do and say. I asked you to tell me about that trip to Shriner's, and all that you have said was, in effect, that you had had a lovely time. I asked you whether that man Bradley had kissed you or had tried to; who he was and where you

had met him. Not a word from you on that subject! Now you calmly tell me that you are going to a dance with him by way of the Lake Road to the Red Rose Inn—a matter of four miles in a round-about direction—I mean four miles longer. If I could only come up, you would have an excuse to decline his invitation; but, after all, I suppose that you are right, and that, under the circumstances, you could not go with me.

OF A COQUETTE

Why do you not set my mind
at rest about his kissing you?
It is most aggravating and
tantalizing. I must know! I
shall not be happy until I do.

Ever your loving

HARRY.

XIII

DEAR HARRY :

Your good resolutions seem to have deserted you. I could not possibly decline George's invitation; you only partly comprehend this fact. As for your other questions, it is apparent to me that you have again come under the influence of the fiend of whom you wrote. Please, Harry, keep away from him, and do not let us again

OF A COQUETTE

fall into the way of nagging and fault-finding. I cannot write more to you to-day, because Aunt Hetty has come to spend the afternoon with me.

Ever your own

CLAIRE.

XIV

DEAR CLAIRE:

You have not answered my questions. Did or did not Mr. Bradley kiss you? I have told you that if he did I should give you up. I was never more serious in my life. I forgave you for kissing Charlie Stratton, but this man is a comparative stranger.

I do not propose to have my future wife flirting with every

OF A COQUETTE

man she meets, and you might as well understand this. I shall have no more to say until you comply with my wish.

Yours,

HARRY.

XV

DEAR HARRY:

You are very unkind. You would like to shut me up and never permit me to look at nor speak to any man but you. As I have already told you, I am fond of the society of men, and I cannot help it. I never do anything of which I am ashamed, and I will not be threatened.

As long as I appear to think

you are the only man in the world, you are very kind and gentle, and altogether amiable. But let your imagination run loose and there is no tolerating you. It is like a cyclone gathering fury as it goes. You start with a gentle zephyr, a mere whiff, and in less time than it takes to write about it, you have lashed it into a gigantic whirlwind.

Your disposition is entirely too jealous. I am tired of it, tired of being doubted; tired

of considering what I ought to do. If I had always to stop and think whether this or that is right or wrong, I should die. I am too impulsive for that, and I will not be so hampered.

Since you make an issue of it, and threaten me, I will tell you nothing regarding Mr. Bradley.

Yours,

CLAIRE.

XVI

CLAIRE:

For some time past, I have missed my friend. I found him yesterday and related the circumstances in connection with that man Bradley. He laughed at me in a very peculiar way, and after some reflection, said that I was an unsophisticated fool. I am inclined to agree with him. I

do not wish to say unkind things, nor above all, do I wish to misjudge you. My reason tells me plainly that you are not acting fairly toward me, and I must insist upon knowing the truth. I certainly feel that you have carried this flirtation with that man quite far enough.

I shall carry out my threat, as you call it, if you still refuse to tell me that which I wish to know.

Please do not let your pride

OF A COQUETTE

and willfulness stand in the
way of our happiness.

Yours,

HARRY YARNALL.

XVII

MR. HARRY YARNALL:

You "related the circumstances in connection with that man Bradley" to your "friend," did you? Well, this is my gratuitous opinion of your action. It was detestable. I would not marry a man of your disposition for the Kimberley mines.

Let me give you a little advice, Mr. Yarnall. Girls, as a

rule, do not care for a madly jealous man. They are, perhaps, quite fond of testing a man's love, and rather enjoy his apparent discomfort, but they cannot and will not be nagged at and doubted. Moreover, they glory in their independence for the short while it is theirs; and if a man is willing to accept this gracefully, they generally cease to tease and then love him more than ever.

By express, I send you a

THE LOVE LETTERS

small package for which you may sometime have use. Further, Mr. Yarnall, for your edification, I will tell you that Mr. Bradley did try to kiss me—what I did cannot now be of any possible concern to you.

Very sincerely,

CLAIRE VAUGHN.

XVIII

DEAREST CLAIRE :

You are heartless and cruel. I must see you. I have not been well. I know that you will forgive me after I have talked with you. I have arranged to leave here on Friday night. Please give up the dance for my sake. I am heart-broken.

HARRY.

THE LOVE LETTERS

XIX

MR. HENRY YARNALL:

I will not receive you.

CLAIRE VAUGHN.

XX

*(This note—a penciled scrawl
—was found in Harry Yarnall's pocket.)*

CLAIRE :

I understand all now—I
have heard and seen. The
man whom you know as
George Bradley is a scoundrel.
If not too late, flee from him—
flee from him—

73

EPILOGUE

In the autumn of the following year, I was again in the midst of the scenes wherein had been enacted a tragedy, the memory of which clung to me vividly and persistently. Being there, I had an irresistible desire to meet and converse with Miss Vaughn concerning the death of Harry Yarnall. To contrive such a meeting was, I thought, a comparatively simple task; but

EPILOGUE

to induce her to speak freely, I fancied, would be far more difficult.

Inquiry regarding her place of residence, disclosed the pitiful fact that Miss Vaughn had been dead nearly a year, but that her Aunt Hetty, however, resided in the adjoining house and could probably tell me whatever I wished to know.

I called upon Aunt Hetty—every one called her so—and after an explanation of the deep interest that I had taken

EPILOGUE

in Miss Vaughn, she, with ineffable tenderness, mingled with emotion, related substantially the following incidents :

Claire was brought home in a state of unconsciousness. Brain fever developed, and for many weeks she wavered between life and death. It was harrowing to hear her cry out in her delirium:

“You are not George Bradley. You are—”

There she would stop and then begin again—always the

EPILOGUE

same, "You are not George Bradley. You are—"

You must understand that this man came here, from where, nobody knew. His attention to her was of so marked a character that comment upon it was quite general and, in some instances, unkind. Claire paid dearly for her infatuation. She was never again the bright sunbeam that she was before this dreadful thing happened.

One day she said to me,

EPILOGUE

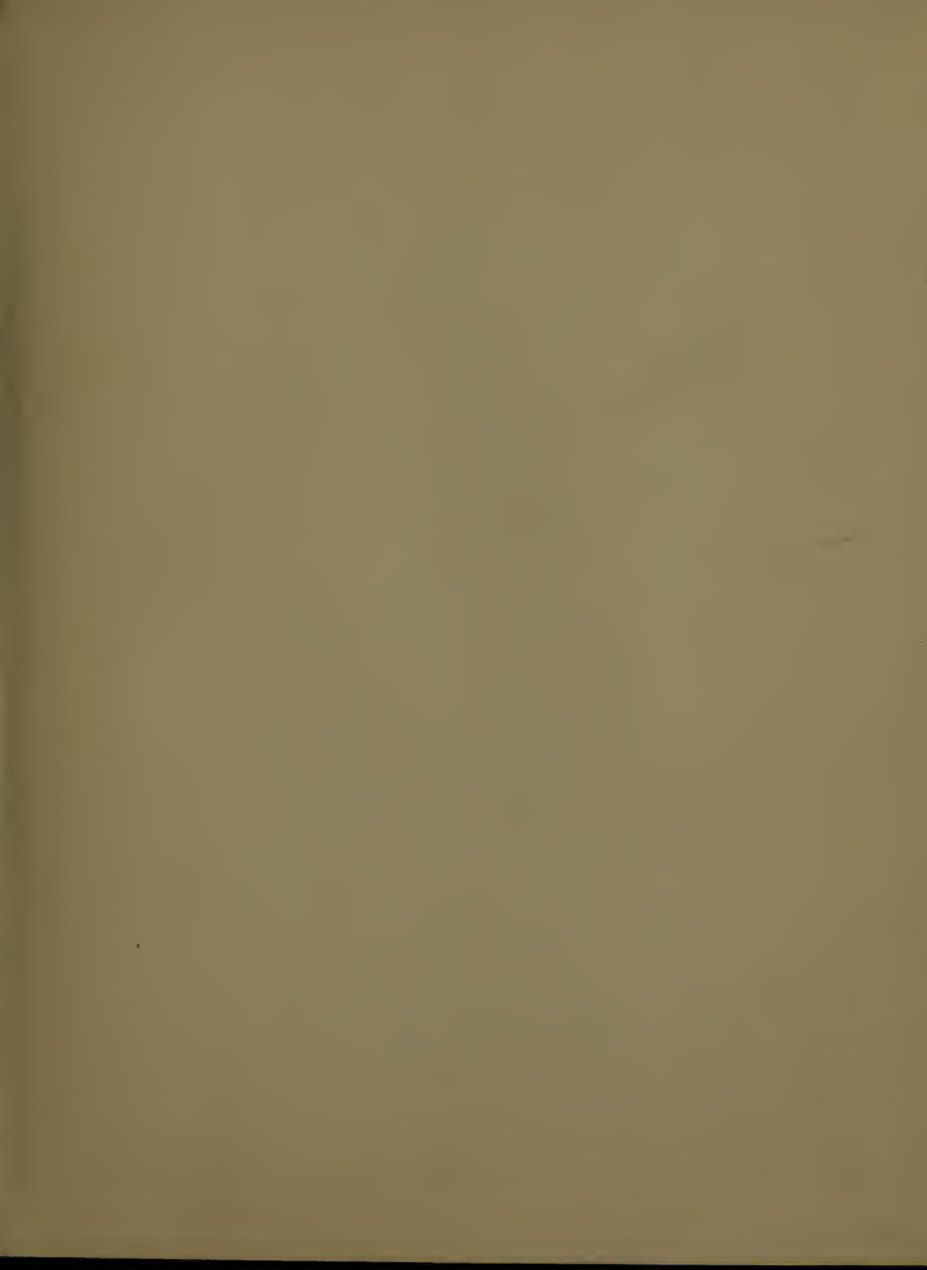
“Auntie, I was cruel to Harry. I killed him. I shall die of grief and remorse.”

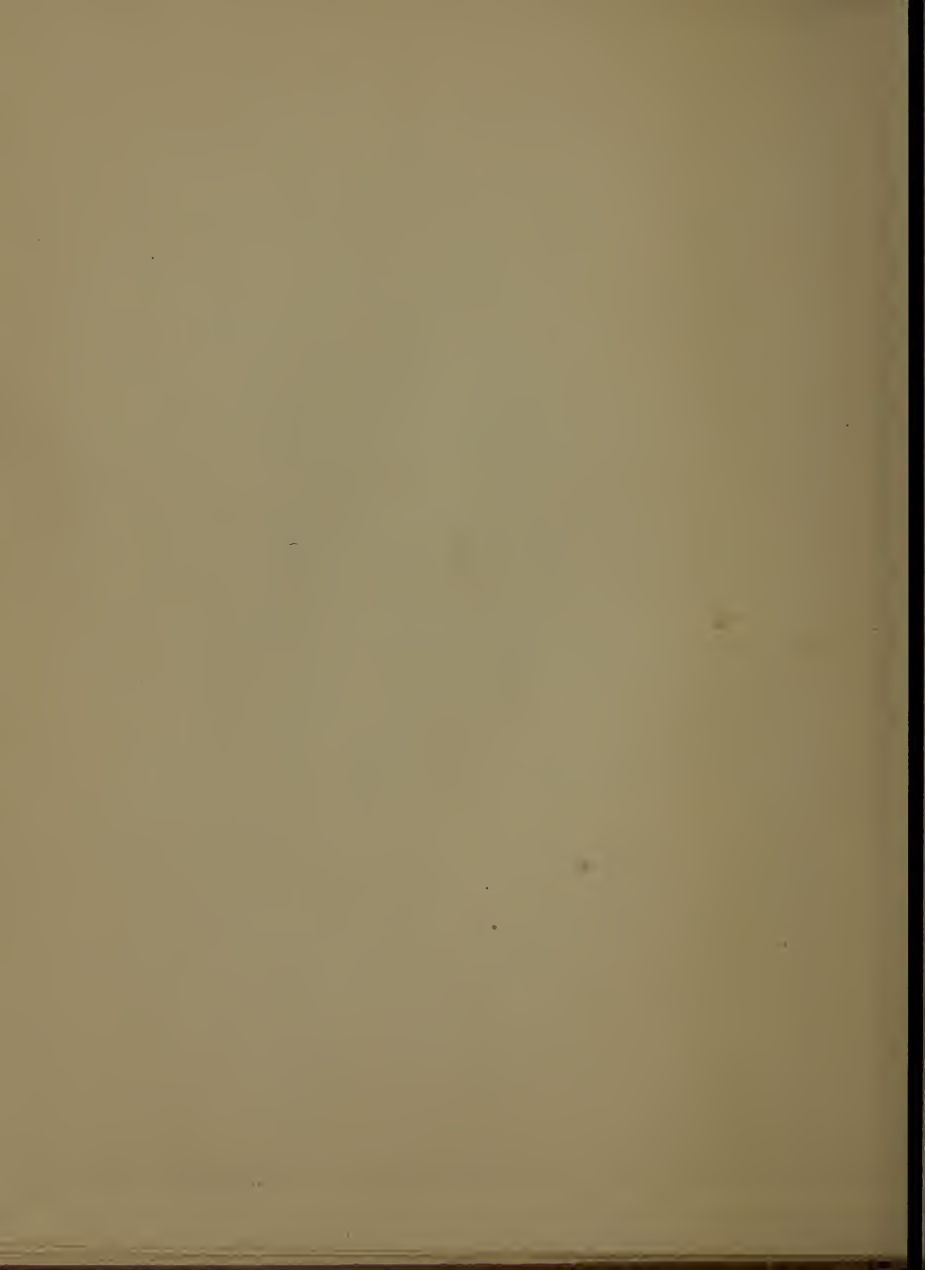
Her recovery was not a rapid one, but when she was finally able to be in the air, she formed a habit of going to the lake where they had found his body. We tried to dissuade her, but our entreaties were unavailing.

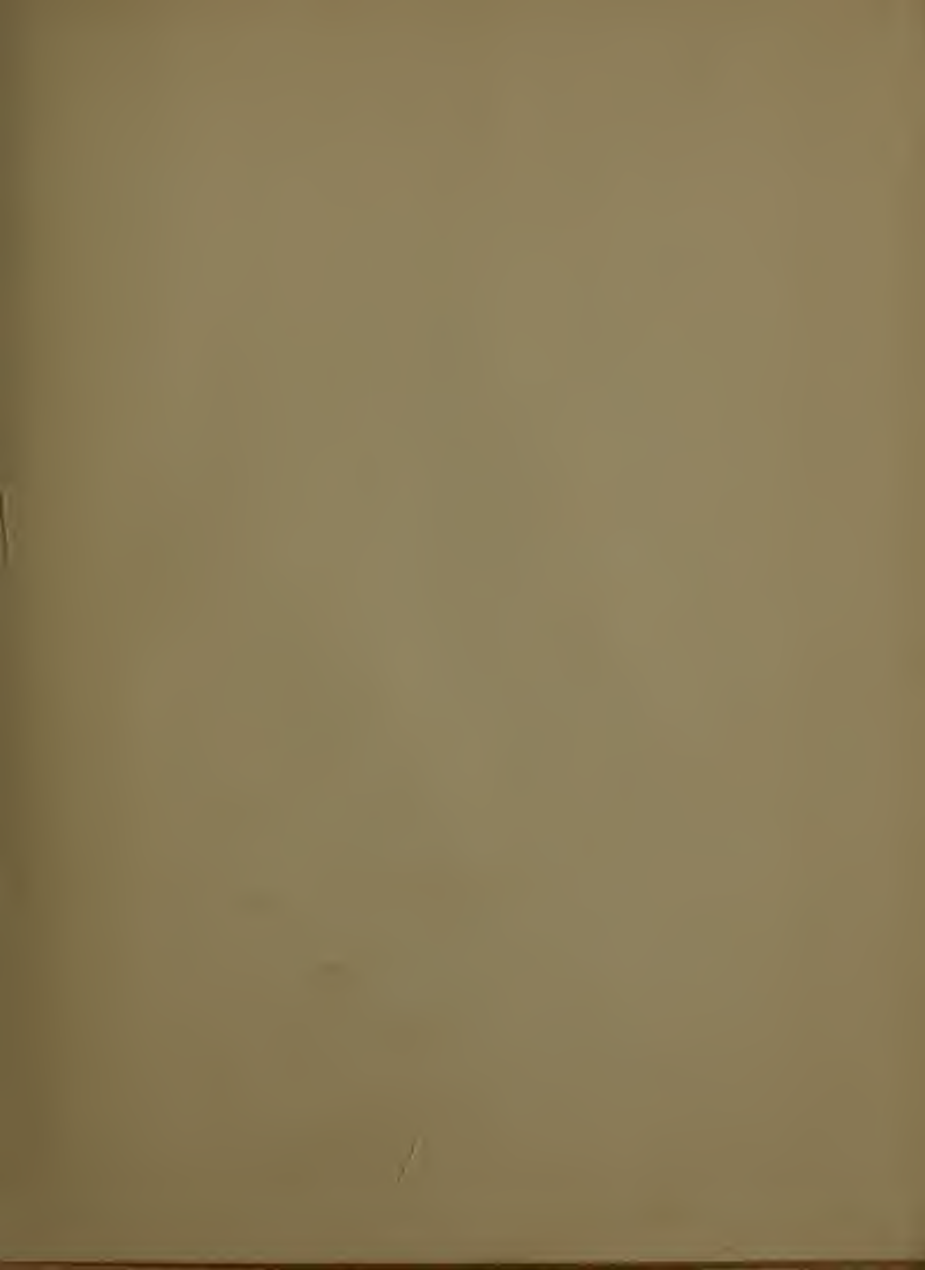
Before she died, she told me that this man—who assumed the name of Bradley—had written to her; confessed that

EPILOGUE

he was Harry's confidant, and pleaded forgiveness. What more he may have said I know not. The evening that she received the letter, she went to the lake. She was gone such a length of time that we became alarmed for her safety, and went in search of her. We found her—crying bitterly. She had a chill—and—in a few days—she was—dead.







FEB 20 1903

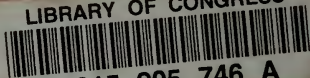
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