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1902

OUR BOYS

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

By H. J. Byron

Author of "Uncle," "Partners for Life," etc.



PHILADELPHIA
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1902

CHARACTERS

SIR GEOFFRY CHAMPNEYS, *a county magnate.*

TALBOT CHAMPNEYS, *his son.*

PERKYN MIDDLEWICK, of Devonshire House, *a retired butterman.*

CHARLES MIDDLEWICK, *his son.*

KEMPSTER, *Sir Geoffry's man servant.*

PODDLES, *Middlewick's butler.*

VIOLET MELROSE, *an heiress.*

MARY MELROSE, *her poor cousin.*

CLARISSA CHAMPNEYS, *Sir Geoffry's sister.*

BELINDA, *a lodging-house slave.*

ACT I AT THE BUTTERMAN'S

Scene—PERKYN MIDDLEWICK'S COUNTRY HOUSE

ACT II AT THE BARONET'S

Scene—DRAWING ROOM IN SIR GEOFFRY'S

SEVEN MONTHS ARE SUPPOSED TO HAVE ELAPSED

ACT III . . MRS. PATCHEM'S THREE-PAIR BACK

Scene—THIRD FLOOR AT A LONDON LODGING HOUSE

Scene—IN ACTS I AND II HERTFORDSHIRE

IN ACT III LONDON

Time—THE PRESENT

*Source unknown
Dec. 20, 1938*

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COSTUMES

ACT I

SIR GEOFFRY CHAMPNEYS.—Fashionable walking suit, cane, gloves, etc., gray wig, and gray side whiskers and mustache.

TALBOT CHAMPNEYS.—Velvet coat and vest, light pants, eye-glasses, flashy necktie, blonde wig parted in centre, blonde side whiskers, and small blonde mustache.

PERKYN MIDDLEWICK.—Light coat and vest, dark pants, bald wig, short reddish hair, also short reddish side whiskers.

CHARLEY MIDDLEWICK.—Fashionable walking suit, black wig and mustache, gloves, etc.

PODDLES.—Full dress.

KEMPSTER.—Livery.

VIOLET.—Handsome walking dress.

MARY.—Suit somewhat plainer than Violet's.

CLARISSA.—Old lady's dress.

ACT II

All in full evening dress. Middlewick's coat and vest trimmed with brass buttons.

ACT III

SIR GEOFFRY.—Overcoat, high hat, and cane.

TALBOT.—Short gray suit, quite shabby.

MIDDLEWICK.—Large ulster, old-fashioned hat, cane, etc.

CHARLEY.—Dark suit, quite shabby.

VIOLET and MARY.—Plain walking dresses.

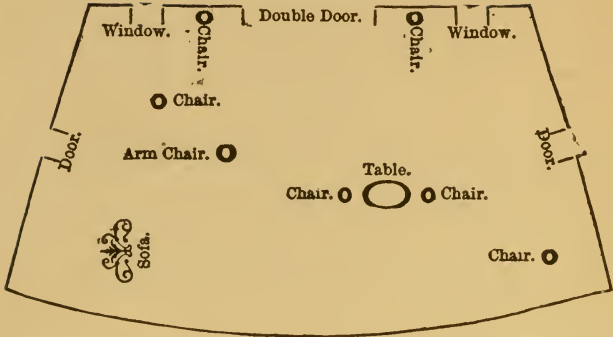
CLARISSA.—Plain dress and shawl, very large bonnet trimmed with quite an assortment of flowers.

BERLINDA.—Old, shabby, short dress, torn apron, shoes unbuttoned, face and arms smeared with dirt, hair generally mussed up.

STAGE SETTINGS

ACT I

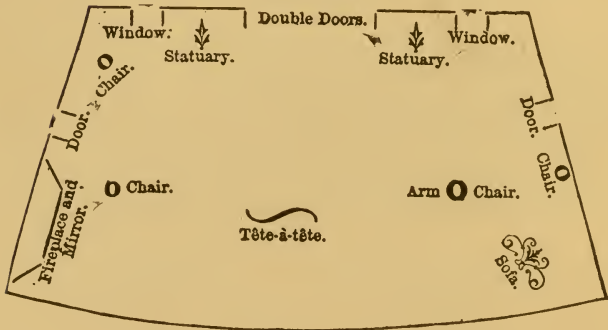
Garden Scene



DRAWING-ROOM IN MIDDLEWICK'S HOUSE

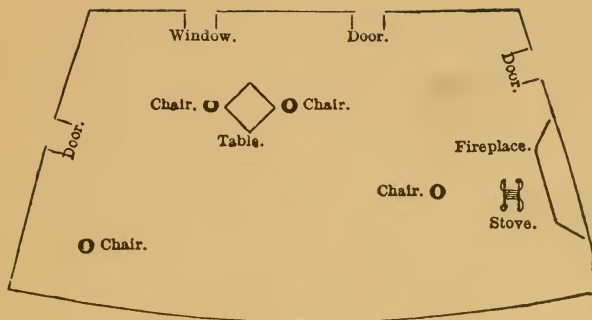
ACT II

Conservatory



DRAWING-ROOM IN SIR GEOFFRY'S HOUSE

ACT III



A VERY SHABBY SITTING-ROOM

PROPERTIES

ACT III

Old shoe on mantel-piece.
Box of blacking and brushes.
Small piece of looking-glass on mantel.
Ink, pen, and paper. Roll of manuscript.
Books on table.
Coal shovel and hod with a little coal.
Tongs and poker at fire.
Small piece of butter on table.
Two eggs, few shells, and cups on table.
Basket and eatables for Clarissa.
Small stove.

OUR BOYS

ACT I

SCENE.—*Handsomely-furnished drawing-room at MIDDLEWICK'S house. French windows at back. Garden backing. Doors, R. and L. PODDLES enters, L. D.*

POD. (*after pause, looking at watch*) Half-past two, I do declare, and the young gents not arrived yet; train's late, no doubt. No wonder master's anxious; I dare say Sir Geoffry's just as anxious about his dear son. Bless me, to hear 'em talking about "*Our Boys*," as they call 'em, one would think there were no other sons and heirs in the whole country but these two young gents a coming home to their governors this afternoon. (*Enter KEMPSTER, C.*)

KEMP. Mr. Poddles, any news of the young gents yet? Sir Geoffry has just driven over, and—

POD. They ought to be here by this time. Mr. Charles wrote, mentioning the time and—

(*SIR GEOFFRY CHAMPNEYS pushes past him and enters c.*)

SIR G. What a time you are, Kempster. Why don't you let me know if Mr.—

KEMP. I beg your parding, Sir Geoffry; I were just inquiring of—

SIR G. Yes, yes; get back to the carriage. (*Exit KEMPSTER.*) (*To PODDLES*) Is your master in?

POD. I'll see, Sir Geoffry. If you will be seated, Sir Geoffry, I'll—(*Exit, L. D.*)

SIR G. (*pacing the room impatiently and looking at watch and fidgetting*) Yes, yes. The train's late; but I suppose they won't—Why hasn't Talbot answered my letter? Why does he keep me on the rack? He knows how anxious I am. Haven't set eyes on the dear boy for three years, and I'm longing to hear his views on men and things. They'll be the same as mine, I know. (*Enter MISS CLARISSA CHAMPNEYS, the Baronet's sister, an elderly young lady.*)

CLAR. I couldn't refrain from following you, Geoffry. I am so anxious about the dear boy.

SIR G. (*tetchily*) Of course you're anxious. *I'm* anxious.

CLAR. And I've no doubt Mr. Middlewick is just as anxious about *his* dear boy.

SIR G. Clarissa, I'm surprised at you. Because these young men happen to have met recently in Paris, and are coming home in company, that is no reason you should link them together in that ridiculous manner. My son comes of an ancient, honored race. The other young man is the son of a butterman.

CLAR. A *retired* one, remember.

SIR G. Impossible! A butterman *can't* retire.
 You may break, you may shatter the *tub*
 if you will,
 But the scent of the butter will hang
 by it still.

Mr. Middlewick is a most estimable person—charitable—as he *ought* to be; and has considerable influence in the neighborhood.

CLAR. Which accounts for your tolerating him.

SIR G. I admit it. The dream of my life has been that my boy Talbot should distinguish himself in Parliament. To that end I mapped out a complete course of instruction for him to pursue; directed him to follow the plan laid down implicitly; never to veer to the right or left, but to do as I bid him, like—like—

CLAR. Like a machine.

SIR G. Eh? Yes, like a machine. Machines never strike.

CLAR. I hope he'll answer your expectations. Considering his advantages, his occasional letters haven't been *remarkable*, have they? (*Aside*) Except for brevity—which, in *his* case, has *not* been the soul of wit.

SIR G. Dear! dear! Clarissa, what a woman you are! What would you have of the boy? His letters have been a little short, but invariably *pithy*. I don't want my son to be a literary man. I want him to shine in politics and—

CLAR. Suppose Mr. Middlewick's views regarding his son are similar. Supposing he wants *him* to shine in politics.

SIR G. Clarissa, you seem to take a great interest in Mr. Middlewick. A man without an H to his back. A man who—who eats with his knife, who behaves himself in society like an amiable gold-digger, and who—

CLAR. Who is coming up the path. So moderate your voice, Geoffrey, or he'll hear you.

SIR G. You're a very irritating woman, Clarissa, and I don't—don't—(MR. PERKYN MIDDLEWICK *appears at French windows. He is a sleek, comfortable man of about fifty.*)

MID. Hah! Sir Geoffrey, glad to see you. Miss Champ-

neys, your 'umble servant. (*Shakes hands.* SIR GEOFFRY *shakes hands distantly,* MISS CLARISSA *warmly.*) Phew! ain't it 'ot? awful 'ot.

SIR G. (*loftily, R.*) It is very warm.

MID. (C.) Warm! I call it 'ot. (*To CLARISSA*) What do you call it?

CLAR. I call it decidedly "hot."

MID. That's what I say. I say it's 'ot. Well, Sir Geoffrey, any noos?

SIR G. No NEWS.

MID. No noos! Ain't you heard from your son?

SIR G. Not a line.

MID. Oh! *my* boy's written me a letter of about eight pages. He'll be here soon; I sent the shay.

SIR G. Sent the *what*?

MID. The *shay*—the *shay*.

SIR G. Oh! the *chaise*?

MID. No, only *one* of 'em. They'll be here directly. What's the good of Charley writing me a letter with half of it in foreign languages? Here's a bit of French here, and a morsel of 'Talian *there*, and a slice of *Latin*, I suppose it is, further on, and then a something out of one of the poets—leastways, I *suppose* it is, for it's awful rubbish—then, lor! regler rigmarole altogether. S'pose he done it to show as the money wasn't wasted on his eddication.

SIR G. (*with satisfaction*) Hah! rather different from *my* son. *He* prefers to reserve the fruits of *his* years of study until he can present them in person. *Your* son, Mr. Middlewick, has followed the example of the strawberry-sellers and dazzled you with the display of the top. Perhaps when you search *below* yot may find the contents of the pottle *not* so satisfactory. (*Goes up.*)

MID. (*down, C., aside*) Mayhap I may. Mayhap the front tubs is butter and the rest *dummies*. When I first started in business I'd the finest stock in Lambeth—to *look* at. But they was *all* sham. The tubs was 'oller if you turned 'em round, and the very *yams* was 'eartless delooders. Can Charley's letter be—*No*, I won't believe it.

CLAR. (*aside to him*) Don't, dear Mr. Middlewick, don't. (*Goes up in pleasing confusion.*)

MID. (*aside*) That's a very nice, sensible woman. It ain't the *first* time she's been civil to *me*. I'll play the polite to her if it's only to rile old poker-back. (*Goes up to her, L.*)

SIR G. (*down, R.*) I knew "our boys" would drive here first, Mr. Middlewick, which must be my excuse for this in-

trusion, and—(*noise of a carriage driving up heard*) Here they are! here they are!

MID. (*goes up to window*) That's them! that's them!

SIR G. (R.) I feel actually faint, Clarissa. (*Sinks on sofa.*) The thought of seeing my dear, handsome, clever boy again is—is—

CLAR. (*aside*) Don't exhibit this ridiculous weakness, Geoffrey.

SIR G. Before a tradesman, too. You are right. (*Rises.*)

MID. I feel a bit of a—sort of a—kind of a fluttering myself. (*Enter CHARLES MIDDLEWICK, at L. D.*)

CHAR. Father! Dad! Dear old governor! (*Rushes to his father's arms.*)

MID. My boy! My boy! (*Embraces him; they are demonstrative in their delight. CHARLEY is a handsome, gallant young fellow.*)

SIR G. Yes, but where's my son? Where's Talbot? (*Enter TALBOT CHAMPNEYS. He is a washed-out youth, with yellow-reddish hair, parted down the middle; a faint effort at a fluffy whisker and mustache; dreadfully over-dressed, and has a limp look generally; an eye-glass, and a soft, namby-pamby manner.*)

SIR G. Talbot, my dear boy, I'm so delighted to—

TAL. Yes, yes; how are you? Bless my life, how gray you've got—shouldn't have known you. And—that's not Aunt Clarissa? Dear, dear! such an alteration in three years—shouldn't have known you. (*Kisses her; they turn aside conversing.*)

MID. (L.) Well, Charley, old boy, how do I look, eh? Pretty 'arty, for an old 'un.

CHAR. Yes, yes; splendid. (*To him aside*) Hearty, dad, hearty.

MID. Well, I *said* 'arty. And you, Charley—there! Grown out of all knowledge.

CHAR. (*aside*) Grown—hem! (*Seems annoyed at his father's ignorance. Aside to him*) "Grown," governor, "grown."

MID. Ain't got nothing to groan for. (*Aside*) Rum notions they pick up abroad. But, Charley, you ain't introduced me to your friend, Mr. Talbot. Do the honors, do the honors.

CHAR. Talbot, this is my father.

MID. Proud to know you, sir.

TAL. (*through his glass*) How do? how do?

MID. 'Arty as a buck, and fresh as a four-year-old,

thankee. Hope we shall see a good deal of you, Mr. Talbot—any friend of my son's—

SIR G. (*comes down, R.*) Yes, exactly, Mr. Middlewick. Flattered, I'm sure, but our boys' lines of life will be widely apart, I expect. Your son, I presume, will embark in commerce, whilst mine will, I trust, *shine* in a public and, excuse me for adding, a more *elevated* sphere.

MID. (*aside, L. C.*) Yes, he looks like a *shiner*.

CLAR. But, Geoffry, probably Mr. Middlewick and his son would like to be alone a little, so—

MID. Just so. (*Aside*) She *is* a sensible woman. (*To them*) I shouldn't mind if you *did* "get out" for a short time.

SIR G. Exactly. I want a talk with Talbot, too; and as the ponies are put up, Talbot, we'll have a stroll through the grounds.

TAL. I don't mind. Only I'm jolly hungry, that's all. (*Exit, C. and R., with SIR GEOFFRY CHAMPNEYS.*)

MID. (*aside to CLARISSA*) Miss Champneys, what's your candid opinion of your nephew?

CLAR. A *numskull*. (*Exit, C. and R.*)

MID. She is a sensible woman. Charley, not to put too fine a point upon it, your friend's a *fool*. I say it deliberately, Charley, he's a h'ass.

CHAR. (*deprecatingly*) O dad!

MID. And his father destins him for a public career. Ha! ha! Him ever take the public—why, he ain't got it in him to take a beer-shop.

CHAR. (*aside*) Is it that *he* has grown more vulgar, or that *I* have grown more sensitive? Anyhow, it jars terribly. But who am *I* to criticise—what should I have been but for his generosity—his—Bah! Ignorant—H-less as he is, I'd sooner have him for a father than twenty stuck-up Sir Geoffry Champneys.

MID. (*sitting*) And now, Charley, that we're alone, my dear fellow, tell your old dad what your impressions of foreign parts were. When I was your age the Continent was a sealed book to them as wasn't wealthy. There was no Cook's excursions then, Charley; leastways, they seldom went further than White Condick Gardens or Beulah Spor, when they in general come back with their bonnets a one side, and wep' when they was spoke to 'arsh. No, no, you've been born when there was the march o' intellect, and Atlantic cables, and other curious things, and naturally you've benefited thereby. So of course you're a scholar, and seen a deal. Paris, now—nice place, ain't it?

CHAR. Glorious!

MID. 'Ow about the 'orse flesh?

CHAR. A myth.

MID. Really though! And I suppose frogs is fallacies. Only to think.

CHAR. Paris is a paradise. But Italy—well, there!

MID. But ain't it a mass of lazeyroneys?

CHAR. A mere libel. A land of romance, beauty, tradition, poetry! Milan! Venice! Verona! Florence!

MID. Where the *ile* comes from.

CHAR. Rome! Naples!

MID. That's where Vesuvius is, ain't it?

CHAR. Yes.

MID. Was it "fizzin'" when you was there, Charley?

CHAR. No. There was no eruption when I was there.

MID. That's wrong, you know, that's wrong. I didn't limit you, Charley; I said, "See everything," and I certainly expected as you'd insist upon an eruption.

CHAR. But, my dear dad, I saw everything else—Pompeii and Herculaneum.

MID. Eh?

CHAR. Pompeii and Herculaneum—they were *ruined*, you know.

MID. Two unfortunate Italian warehousemen, I suppose.

CHAR. Nonsense! They were buried, you remember.

MID. And why *not*? It'd be a pretty thing to refuse an unlucky firm as went broke a decent—

CHAR. You don't understand.

MID. (*bluntly*) No, I *don't*.

CHAR. But Germany, dad—the Rhine—"the castled crags of Drachenfels"—the Castle of Erhenbreitstein—

MID. Aaron who? Some swell German Jew, I suppose.

CHAR. And the German women. (*Nudges him.*)

MID. Charles, I'm *surprised*. I'm simply—a—What are they like, Charley? (*Gets closer to him.*)

CHAR. (*sighs*) Hah!

MID. Lost your heart, eh?

CHAR. Not to a German girl, oh! no—the lady *I* met who—

SIR G. (*heard without*) Well, we may as well join our friends.

CHAR. (*aside. Rises*) Here's Talbot's delightful father. I wouldn't swap parents with *him* for all his high breeding. Our heart's blood's a trifle cloudy, perhaps, but it *flows* freely—his is so terribly pure it hardly takes the trouble to trickle. No, Talbot, old fellow. I don't envy you your

father. (*Goes up, L., and joins MIDDLEWICK.*) (SIR GEOFFREY enters, followed by TALBOT, C. and R.)

SIR G. (*coming down, R.*) But really, Talbot, you must have *some* ideas on what you have seen.

TAL. What's the use of having ideas when you can pick 'em up in the guide-books?

SIR G. (*pleased*) Ah, then you *are* fond of *reading*? Good.

TAL. Reading! Ha! ha! I hate it. (*Sits, R. C.*)

SIR G. (*trying to excuse him*) Well, well; perhaps *some* fathers set too great a value on books. After all, one's fellow-man is the best volume to study. And as one who, I hope, may ripen into a statesman—your general appearance strongly reminds me of Pitt, by-the-bye—perhaps you are right.

MID. (*aside, to CHARLEY*) Finest you ever saw. Sir Geoffrey, we shall be back shortly. (*Exit, L. D., with CHARLEY.*)

SIR G. And you actually saw nothing in the Rhine.

TAL. Oh! yes, I *did*.

SIR G. That's well.

TAL. No end of *mud*.

SIR G. But Cologne, now?

TAL. Famous for its Cathedral and its smells. Both, I regret to say, unfinished.

SIR G. But Germany, generally?

TAL. Detestable.

SIR G. Switzerland. Come, you were a long time there. There you saw nature in all its grandeur. Your Alpine experiences were—

TAL. Limited—*very* limited. I *admired* those venturesome beings who risked their necks, but it was at a distance. I can't say a *respectful* distance, for I thought them fools.

SIR G. No doubt you were right. (*Aside*) Prudence, caution, forethought—excellent qualities. (*To him*) Italy?

TAL. *Second-hand* sort of country. Things, as a rule, give you a notion of being unredeemed pledges. Everything old and cracked. Didn't care for it. Jolly glad to get to Paris.

SIR G. (*with a relish*) Ha! The Louvre, eh?

TAL. Yes. I preferred "Mabille."

SIR G. A *public* building?

TAL. Rather. But even Paris palls on a fellow.

SIR G. (*rising and taking his hand*) I *see*, Talbot, like a true Champneys, you prefer your native land to all those meretricious foreign places. Well, dear boy, you've a glo-

rious career before you, and it only rests with you to follow it up. I have arranged a marriage—

TAL. A what!

SIR G. Not *arranged* it exactly, but it *can* be arranged—*shall* be.

TAL. (*quietly*) Provided, of course, I approve of the lady.

SIR G. Eh! *You* approve! What have *you* got to do with it?

TAL. Quite as much as *she* has, and rather more than *you*, considering *I* should have to live with her and *you* wouldn't.

SIR G. (*annoyed*) Talbot, I'm afraid you have picked up some low Radical opinions during your residence abroad. I expect obedience. I have done all a father can for a son. You will wed, sir, as *I* wish; you will espouse my politics, be returned for Lufton by *my* influence, and—

TAL. Unless Charley Middlewick chooses to *stand*—

SIR G. (*in horror*) Charley Middlewick chooses to stand?

TAL. In which case I—

SIR G. Yes?

TAL. Should *sit down*.

SIR G. (*sits back*) Talbot Champneys, you surprise me—you wound me. You have received every advantage that money could procure—you have come back after your lengthened foreign experiences, *not*—I must admit with pain—*not* what I *quite* expected. Possibly I looked for too much, but surely it was not an extravagant hope to indulge in that you would obey me in the one important step in a man's life—his marriage. The lady I have selected is wealthy, young, and handsome. She is on a visit to your aunt, so you will have ample opportunity for ingratiating yourself. You will not thwart me in this, my dear Talbot! (*Taking his hand.*)

TAL. Well, before promising anything you must trot her out.

SIR G. Trot her out?

TAL. Yes, yes; put her through her paces—let's judge of her points. You don't expect a fellow to buy a pig in a poke?

SIR G. Hem! (*Aside*) Very remarkable language. If anybody else spoke so I should say it was vulgar, but *my son!* It's—ha! ha!—eccentricity; his great-uncle Joseph was eccentric—he— (*Looks aside at TALBOT and sighs deeply.*)

TAL. (*aside*) Married whether I like it or *not*. Not if I know it. I'm going to "go it" a bit before *I* settle down.

I have gone it a *bit* already, and I'm going to "go it" a bit *more*. It's the governor's fault; he shouldn't have mapped out my career with compass and rule. A man's not an express train, to be driven along a line of rails and never allowed to shunt on his *own* account. There's Charley's father lets him have his fling and no questions asked. The governor's had his hobby—let him pay for it—he can *do* it. (CLARISSA has entered, spoken briefly aside to SIR GEOFFRY, and is now down beside TALBOT.)

CLAR. Talbot, it is so delightful to have you back again. I shall now have such charming evenings with you at chess.

TAL. At what?

CLAR. Chess—the king of games.

TAL. Do you call it a *game*? Ha! ha! No, thankee; life's too short for chess.

CLAR. Well, well: we'll say backgammon.

TAL. I don't mind *saying* backgammon, but you don't catch me *playing* backgammon.

CLAR. Well, then, we must even continue our usual cozy evenings. I do my wool-work, whilst your papa reads us the debates. That's our regular evening's programme.

TAL. (*aside*) They must have had a rollicking time of it. The debates! A dozen columns of dullness filtered through your father. Not for Talbot.

CLAR. But now we have music. Miss Melrose plays charmingly. Do you like music?

TAL. Ye-e-s. I don't like *pieces*, you know—five-and-twenty minutes of fireworks. I like anything with a good chorus.

CLAR. Ah, so does Miss Melrose's *cousin*.

SIR G. (*at CLARISSA, to stop her*) He-hem! He-hem!

CLAR. (*aside*) I forgot.

TAL. (*suspiciously, aside*) Halloa! why did he make that elaborate but utterly ineffective attempt to cough down the cousin? (*Looks at SIR GEOFFRY and CLARISSA*) I see it *all* at a glance. The heiress is to be flung at my *head*, not the cousin at my *heart*. Future, luck, destiny, and all the *lot* of you, I see my fate. I marry that cousin.

SIR G. (*aside to CLARISSA*) Mary Melrose, the cousin, must be sent away.

CLAR. (*aside*) But she won't *go*.

SIR G. Talbot is a—Talbot is a—

CLAR. Talbot's a fool.

SIR G. (*wounded, yet proud*) Clarissa Champneys, Talbot is my son,

CLAR. Geoffry Champneys, Talbot is *my nephew*. I only wish I could exchange him for young Mr. Middlewick.

SIR G. You irritate me—you incense me—go to the *deuce*, Clarissa!

CLAR. Ha! ha! Come along, Talbot; let's go and see Mr. Middlewick's pigs, perhaps *they'll* interest you. (*Takes his arm.*)

TAL. (*has been taking out a large cigar*) You don't mind my smoking?

CLAR. Not a bit.

TAL. D'ye think the pigs 'll object?

CLAR. (*aside*) He's an idiot.

TAL. (*aside*) She's a nuisance. (*To her*) Tell us all about the cousin. (*They go out.*)

SIR G. Of course women can never hold their tongues. Mary Melrose *is* pretty—penniless though. Mischievous, too, as a girl can well be. And no taste—goes to sleep when I read the debates. Wakes up when it's time to say "good night," and wants to play billiards. A very dangerous young woman. (VIOLET MELROSE *heard without, c. and r.*)

VIO. Now, Mary, you must promise to behave yourself, or you shall *not* come out with me again.

SIR G. That's Violet; that's the *heiress*—and of course her cousin Mary with her. Confound it! They're as inseparable as—I'll try and walk off Talbot. He must see and love *Miss* Melrose. Yes, why not "love"? My father commanded *me* to love, and I was too dutiful a son not to obey him on the *instant*. I *loved* madly—to order. (*Exit hastily, L. D.*) (*Enter VIOLET MELROSE.*)

VIO. Where can they have got to? (*Enter MARY MELROSE, the poor cousin, both dressed in the best taste.*)

MARY. What a handsome place. Looks awfully new though, doesn't it? Seems as if it was painted and decorated yesterday, and furnished in the middle of the night—in order to be ready for the visitors this morning. I seem to smell the hay and sacking that enveloped the legs of the chairs and tables. Don't *you*, Violet?

VIO. Certainly *not*. Mary, don't make remarks.

MARY. Why not? I *like* to make remarks.

VIO. Yes, you like to do a great many things you *shouldn't* do.

MARY. So does every one. If one's always to do what's proper and correct, life might as well be all rice-pudding and toast and water. I hate them *both*, they're so dreadfully wholesome.

VIO. I don't know what excuse we shall make for com-

ing here. It looks as if we were impatient to see the young men.

MARY. So we are. At least I am. We've seen no one of the male sex at old Champneys'.

VIO. Mary!

MARY. Begging his pardon. Sir Geoffry Champneys—*Bart's*—no one under the age of fifty.

VIO. Why, Mary, there's Mr. Sedative, he isn't thirty.

MARY. Oh! Sedative's a curate and don't count. Besides, he blushes when you speak to him, and, altogether, he's a muff. He's awfully good and devoted to his mother and all that, but—well, there, he isn't my sort.

VIO. I don't know who *is* your sort, Mary.

MARY. Oh! it's all very well for *you*, you know; you can pick and choose—if you haven't picked and chosen.

VIO. Mary, you—how can you?

MARY. Violet, my dear, don't try to impose upon *me*. I know the impression young Morton made upon your susceptible heart. I tried hard to ensnare him, but you beat me. Oh! you *quiet* ones, I wouldn't trust you out of my sight—(*aside*) or in it, for the matter of that.

VIO. You're always thinking of love and marriage and all that nonsense.

MARY. Of course I am. There's nothing else worth thinking about. It's all very well for *you*—you're rich, and you have your tenants, and your pensioners, and your dependents, and I don't know *what*, to interest you. I've nothing. (*Sighs.*) I wish I was rich.

VIO. Then marry some one with money.

MARY. Never! (*After a slight pause*) Unless he's *nice*, then I will—oh! yes, I don't go in for "love in a cottage." I never could understand the theory of "bread and cheese and kisses." I *hate* bread and cheese.

VIO. (*with admonitory finger*) And—

MARY. (*sighs*) I know nothing about the rest.

VIO. You mercenary girl. Mark me, you'll marry a rich man.

MARY. Certainly—if I like him.

VIO. But as for a *poor* one?

MARY. I'll marry him if I like him better.

VIO. I can't make you out; you're simply the most—
(*Enter CHARLES MIDDLEWICK quickly.*)

MARY. (*aside*) Morton!

CHAR. Why, Miss Melrose!

VIO. Oh! can it be—(*Sinks into chair.*)

MARY. If anybody'd catch me, I think I could faint.

CHAR. Let me. (*Catches her in his arms.*) My dear Miss Melrose, I—

VIO. (*recovers suddenly*) Mr. Morton!!

CHAR. Miss Melrose! (*Leaves MARY and goes to VIOLET.*) Can I—*can* I believe my eyes? What are you doing here?

VIO. What are *you* doing here?

CHAR. Morton isn't my name. I assumed it at Bonn, like a fool, because of a scrape I got into with an offensive and warlike student, which resulted in his being rather severely wounded—an insolent hound. No, I've come back here to my home, to my father, and—

VIO. (*aside, romantically*) Come back to his father, to his home! Mary, is—*is* this destiny?

MARY. (*aside to her*) If it *is* destiny, dear, don't you think I'd better go away for a short time?

VIO. No, no, Mary, don't go, by any means.

MARY. I wouldn't *dream* of such a thing. (*Exit c. and R.*)

CHAR. Life's made up of surprises. Only to think of meeting you here.

VIO. You took no particular trouble to find out *where* to meet me, did you?

CHAR. You left Vienna so abruptly. You wouldn't have had me advertise?

VIO. Really!

CHAR. Lost, stolen, or strayed, a young lady, etc., etc. Any one restoring her to her disconsolate admirer, Charles—a—

VIO. Mr. Morton, upon my word, I—

CHAR. (*ardently*) And upon *my* word, this is the happiest moment of my life; no, it's run hard by the *other* moment, when, under the shadow of the trees, with the wild river rushing at our feet, you half—*half* whispered a word or two that led me to hope. O Violet! I swear by—by—by those eyes—and what could a man swear by *truer* (*or, query, bluer*)—I've never ceased to think of you, to *dream* of you—

VIO. To *dream* of me? What, not when you've been awake?

CHAR. I've never been awake; life, since we parted, has been one long sweet siesta in which your image was ever foremost. The chief cause, the *only* cause of my hastening home was to search *you* out. I knew your wandering ways, and meant to track you. You said you intended staying the summer at Biarritz. But fortune has favored me as she never yet favored man, and placed the prize in my arms.

VIO. (*pleased, but trying to be severe*) In where?

CHAR. (*throwing his arm around her*) There! (*Slight pause.*)

VIO. Mr. Morton, I'm ASHAMED of you.

CHAR. Miss Melrose, I'm *proud* of YOU.

VIO. Really, I—

CHAR. You wouldn't have me think you a flirt—a coquette?

VIO. Indeed, no.

CHAR. You *would* be one if when you breathed those half-dozen delicious words you only meant to trifle with me. I've lived upon that sentence ever since—looking ardently forward to the day when I could present myself in *propria persona* as I do now. Violet, don't turn away, for—(SIR GEOFFRY *coughs without.*)

VIO. (*rather agitated*) There's somebody coming.

CHAR. Confound it! in this life there always *is* somebody coming. (*Goes up, L.*)

SIR G. (*enters*) I can't find him—he isn't with the pigs. (*To VIOLET*) I regret that my son—

VIO. Why, Sir Geoffrey—you must have intended it as a wicked surprise. Your son and I are acquainted.

SIR G. Has he, then, already—

VIO. Oh! before—

SIR G. Good gracious! You must not mind his being a little bashful and retiring.

VIO. Oh! I didn't find him so at *all*.

SIR G. (*aside*) The deuce she didn't! met before?

VIO. At Vienna.

SIR G. Is it possible? And you don't—don't dislike him?

VIO. Oh! who *could*!

SIR G. (*aside*) I can't believe my—the young rascal! all his opposition was *assumed* then—a deep, young dog. Ha! ha! Well, he took me in. Ha! ha! Yes, he took me in.

CHAR. (*down*) I hope, Sir Geoffrey, we shall—

SIR G. Yes, yes, young gentleman, all in good time, but just at present you see we—

VIO. I should like to hear, though, what your son was about to say.

SIR G. (*seeing with horror the mistake*) My—my son! *This* person—he's no son of mine.

CHAR. (*half aside*) No—thank Heaven!

VIO. (*shrinks from him; bitterly*) Twice an impostor!

CHAR. Violet, I—(*Enter L. D. MIDDLEWICK and MISS CLARISSA; at C., MARY and TALBOT.*)

MID. It's true, mum. Every one on 'em was ag'in me

doin' it. Halloa—who's the gals! (*At hearing the intensely vulgar voice of MIDDLEWICK, VIOLET has shrunk, and evidently shocked, assumes a cold look. CHARLEY perceives it, and by his expression shows he resents her manner.*)

TAL. (*to MARY*) D'ye know I feel as if I'd known you ever so long?

MARY. And I've quite taken to you—*fact*—(*SIR GEOFFRY, who has observed this with suppressed rage, takes TALBOT by the arm, with a slight wrench, brings him to VIOLET.*)

CHAR. (*aside*) I could read a volume in her altered look.

SIR G. This, Violet, is—is *my son!*

CHAR. (*seizing MIDDLEWICK's hand with a grasp of affection; proudly*) And *this, Miss Melrose, is my father!*

ACT DROP,

ACT II

SCENE.—*Drawing-room at SIR GEOFFRY CHAMPNEYS'.
Doors, R. and L., and French windows to conservatory.
KEMPSTER discovered.*

KEMP. Well, things are coming to a pretty pass when we have such visitors to dinner as Mr. Middlewick, *senor*. Three 'elps to soup, and his napkin tucked round his neck for all the world like a carver at a *cafe*—a common *cafe*. (*down*) And yet, somehow, I fancy his 'art's in the right place; I know his 'and is (that's his pocket) a precious deal oftener than the governor's. I've heard, too, as the servants at his place are fed on the fat of the land. Hem! *we ain't*. There's a deal too much *show* here. Three mutton cutlets for four people, who've the consolation of knowing the dishes is 'all marked, though when a party's hungry silver ain't satisfying. (*Enter SIR GEOFFRY and MIDDLEWICK, in evening dress, MIDDLEWICK'S a little old-fashioned and extravagant—large, double-breasted white waistcoat and plenty of necktie.*)

SIR G. Yes, yes, Mr. Middlewick, you are perfectly right. (*to KEMPSTER*) Send our coffee in here.

KEMP. (*aside*) They're a-gettin' thick, they're a-gettin' uncommon thick. (*Exit L. D.*)

SIR G. You enjoyed your dinner?

MID. (*sits*) Fust-rate. *Hay one.*

SIR G. Good! And you don't mind leaving your wine for a chat?

MID. Not a bit. Can't abear claret, and port pays me out. I never knew what gout was when I had my shop.

SIR G. He-hem!

MID. (*aside*) He always shies at the shop. Well, I won't tread on his aristocratic corns; it ain't fair, for after all, *they're* tender, and *I'm* 'eavy.

SIR G. I'm delighted, Mr. Middlewick, to welcome under my roof so successful a representative of the commercial spirit of the age. Champneys Hall, as a rule, has been honored by the visits of people of birth *solely*. Your presence here is a pleasing exception.

MID. Sir Geoffry, you do me *honor*. Of course money's always a—

SIR G. Not *wholly*. I anticipate your remark. Personal worth must count for something.

MID. Fust-rate theory—*phylantropic* and all that—but it don't wash, Sir Geoffry. Take *yourself*, for instance. When you stroll about 'ere, everybody you meet touches his 'at. How many does so when you walks down Fleet Street?

SIR G. Everybody touches his hat to *you*, Mr. Middlewick.

MID. Not a bit of it. See here; *that's* what they touches their 'ats to. (*slaps his pocket, which rattles with the sound of money*) Money makes the *mare* to go—the *mare*—rubbish! It sets the whole *stable* a gallopin'! If I go into a shop shabby the counter-skipper treats me familiar, pre-aps 'aughty. If I wear new broad cloth he calls me "Sir." There you 'ave it in a nutshell.

SIR G. Mr. Middlewick, I admit that money exercises an undue influence in the world and to an extent with vulgar—I repeat, *vulgar* minds—elbows birth, worth, virtue, and—a—all that sort of thing a little out of the way. That is why so many of us—I say US—live in the country, where—where—

MID. Jes' so. *I* know. You're somebody 'ere—nobody there. Quite right; that's why *I* settled in the country.

SIR G. Your career has been a remarkable one.

MID. Extra-ordinary. I was lucky from a baby. Found a farden when I was two years old, and got five-shilling piece for 'olding a 'orse when I was playing truant at the age of six. When I growed up everything I touched turned up trumps. I believe if I'd purchased a ship-load of Dutch cheeses, the man with the van 'ud a' delivered me Stiltons. I believe as the government went to war a purpose to give me a openin' for contracts. Bacon! Well, there—bless your 'art, what I made out of bacon alone was a little independence. I never meet a pig in the road that I don't feel inclined to take off my 'at to him.

SIR G. Ha! ha! ha!

MID. Every speculation proved a success. It seemed as if I was in the secret of life's lucky bag, and had been put up to where I was to pick out the prizes. Some folks said, "'Old 'ard, Perkyn, my boy, you'll run aground." Well, I *didn't* "'old 'ard," I "'eld on," and here I am, Sir Geoffry, at the age of fifty-three able to buy up any 'arf a dozen nobs in the county.

SIR G. (*aside*) Nobs! He *is* a *PILL* for all his gilding.

MID. But if *I'm* not a gentleman, there's my boy.

SIR G. Who, I have a sort of suspicion, admires Violet Melrose.

MID. What! The stuck-up rich gal. No! no!

SIR G. (*eagerly*) You think *not*?

MID. Certain. My son knows better than to thwart *me*. Miss Melrose snubbed me when we first met—has cold-shouldered me ever since. Do you suppose my boy Charley would have anything to say to a young woman as despised his father?

SIR G. (*shaking hands*) My dear Middlewick, you delight me. Of *course* not. I was foolishly suspicious. I want *my* son to marry Miss Melrose. He will do so of course—for he has never disobeyed me; he has been brought up strictly to acknowledge my authority and—

MID. And *won't*, I'll warrant. Your system's a mistake—*mine's* the correct one. I've always given my boy his fling—never baulked him from a baby. If he cried for the moon we give him a Cheshire cheese immediate—that being the nearest substitute 'andy. *Now* he'd obey my slightest wish.

SIR G. Will he! Ha! ha! Let us hope so. (*Enter VIOLET MELROSE.*)

VIO. Interrupting a *tête-à-tête*, I'm afraid.

SIR G. Not at all, Miss Melrose.

MID. Oh! no, not at all—not at all. (*Rises and going up. Aside.*) “Taturtate”—always coming out with her *Italian*. Ha, she's not a patch upon the cousin; she's the gal for my money.

SIR G. (*down. Aside in an undertone to VIOLET*) Miss Melrose—may I say *Violet*—I trust Talbot's manner, modest as it is, has impressed you. You must not take him for the fool—I mean you mustn't imagine he is the less ardent because he doesn't talk poetry like young Mr. Middlewick, or—

VIO. (*with temper*) Oh! don't mention him, Sir Geoffry—that young gentleman seems to ignore my existence.

SIR G. (*aside*) Good. Son sees father snubbed and retaliates. (*To her*) Ha! ha! do you know—pardon my absurdity—at first I actually imagined there was some trifling tenderness in that quarter. But I see by your face I was mistaken. You are above being dazzled by good looks.

VIO. (*with a natural burst*) And he is good-looking, isn't he?

SIR G. (*a little haughtily*) He—hem! He's *long*—but nothing *distingué*—Talbot now is not what one would call a striking figure, but there's a concealed intellectuality—a hidden something or other—you'll understand what I mean but I'm at a loss for the word at the moment—that is none the less effective in the long run—(*with pleasant earnestness*)

a—then, my dear Violet, he's the heir to a baronetcy. He's an embryo statesman, and he *adores* you. Didn't you observe him at dinner? He ate nothing—*drank* nothing—which—and I say it at the risk of being considered a too observant host—is *more* than can be said of young Middlewick.

VIO. (*aside*) That's true, for I watched him.

CHAR. (*heard without, L.*) Ha! ha! ha! *You* play billiards! why, you know as much of the game as the King of Ashanti knows of—

TAL. (*heard L.*) Ha! ha! Play *you* any day in the week.

MID. (*down*) I say, Sir Geoffry, them boys are going it, ain't they?

VIO. (*aside*) "Them boys!"

MID. (*aside*) I see her sneer.

SIR G. (*aside*) Every time he opens his mouth improves Talbot's chance. (*Enter CHARLEY and TALBOT. CHARLEY is a little excited with wine, but not in the least tipsy—he has been helping himself freely to drown his annoyance at VIOLET'S hauteur and evident horror of his father. TALBOT'S manner is of the same washed-out, flabby nature as previously shown.*)

CHAR. Ha! ha! ha! Here's Talbot Champneys trying to argue with me about billiards. Why, man, you can't see as far as the spot ball.

SIR G. The fact of being short-sighted is scarcely a happy subject for jesting.

VIO. (*with suppressed temper*) I quite agree with you, Sir Geoffry.

CLAR. (*has entered*) It's aristocratic; double eye-glasses look rather *distingué*, I think.

CHAR. (*at VIOLET*) Yes, those who are *not* aristocratic may sometimes suffer from the affection. There are short-sighted fools in the world who are *not* swells.

VIO. (*aside*) He thinks that severe.

MID. Bless your 'art, yes; we had a carman as was always driving into everythink; at last he run over a boy in the Boro', and that got him his quietum.

CHAR. Yes, yes, you told us before about him.

MID. (*aside*) Don't, Charley, don't. If you only brought me out to shut me up, I might as well be a tellyscope.

SIR G. (*aside to VIOLET*) Charming papa-in-law he'll make to somebody.

VIO. Don't, don't (*looking at CHARLEY*). He's looking daggers at me, and I've done nothing.

TAL. It's rather rich your talking of beating me at bil-

iards, considering that I've devoted the last three years to billiards and nothing *else*.

SIR G. (*aside*) The deuce he has! That's pleasant for a father to hear. Oh! a—exaggeration.

TAL. It's rather amusing your bragging of rivalling *me*. And when you talk about my not being able to see the spot ball, all I can say is—

CHAR. Ha! ha! ha! If you *can't*, you've a capital eye for the *pocket*. (*At VIOLET. VIOLET shows she sees the thrust.*)

MID. Ah, well, *bagatelle's* more in my way. When me and a few neighbors used to take our glass at the Peterboro' Arms, we—

CHAR. Yes, yes, father—

MID. (*aside*) He's bit. That gal's bit him. It'll be an awkward day for Charley when he shows he's ashamed of his governor.

CLAR. I agree with Mr. Middlewick—*bagatelle's* charming.

VIO. So it is, Miss Champneys.

CLAR. So innocent.

SIR G. (*rising*) Come, who's for a game of billiards then? I never touch a cue, but I'll play you fifty up, Mr. Middlewick, and my sister here and your son shall see all fair. Come, you shall see that there is even a worse player in the world than yourself. (*Aside*) There couldn't be a better opportunity for leaving Talbot and Violet alone. (*To him*) What say?

MID. I'm agreeable—you must teach me, though.

CLAR. I will do that, if you will allow me.

MID. Only too 'appy. (*Goes off, R. D., with CLARISSA.*)

SIR G. (*aside to TALBOT*) Now's your time, bring matters to a crisis.

VIO. (*taking SIR GEOFFRY'S arm the other side*) Sir Geoffrey, I'll back you.

SIR G. (*going toward R. D. annoyed. Aside*) Confound it! (*To VIOLET*) You really are most—a—I can't play a bit—(*As they exit VIOLET gives a sort of half sneering, half mischievous laugh at CHARLEY, who can with difficulty restrain his annoyance. When they are off, he turns, finding himself face to face with TALBOT. TALBOT is bringing out a pipe, and filling it.*)

CHAR. Well.

TAL. Well.

CHAR. What are you going to do?

TAL. What are you?

CHAR. I don't know.

TAL. I do. I'm going to have a smoke in the stable. Also a good think.

CHAR. A good what?

TAL. Think. I'm in love.

CHAR. *You!*

TAL. Why shouldn't I be? You tall chaps always think you can monopolize all the love-making in the world. You can love *short*, just the same as you can love *long*. I tell you I'm *gone*. D'ye hear? *Gone*.

CHAR. (*bitterly*) I'm happy to hear it. I shall be happier when you *prove* the fact. (*Moves away*.)

TAL. I'm off. When you want a *weed* you know where to find me. (*Exit*.)

CHAR. In *love* is he? I don't wonder at it—she'd entice a hermit from his *cell*—and—and—send him back *sold*. She can't have a heart. (*Enter MARY*) Ah, women are all alike.

MARY. What a frightful observation! And at the top of your voice, too.

CHAR. I mean it.

MARY. No, you don't.

CHAR. If I don't may I be—

MARY. Jilted?

CHAR. Jilted. The foolish phrase for one of the cruelest crimes—I say it advisedly, *crimes*—that can disgrace *female*—I won't say *human*—nature.

MARY. Dear! dear! dear!

CHAR. (*with feeling*) Hearts are not playthings to be broken like children's drums just to see what's inside them. A man's feelings are not toys to be trifled with and tossed aside. Love in a true man means *love*—love pure and simple and unselfish—the devotion of his whole mind and being to one in whose weal or woe his very soul's wrapped up. With women—

MARY. What a pity it is Talbot Champneys can't talk like you—and going into Parliament too.

CHAR. Talbot Champneys—yes—*his* relatives are well-spoken, well-born *somebodys*, and so she favors him.

MARY. She? Who?

CHAR. Absurd! there's only *one* she.

MARY. That's very polite to *me*, I'm sure.

CHAR. Oh! you know what I mean. In *my* eyes.

MARY. Exactly. But you don't monopolize all the visual organs of the universe. There are *other* eyes that may have looked *elsewhere*.

CHAR. Why, what on earth—

MARY. (*modestly*) I don't think Talbot *does* admire Violet.

CHAR. Eh?

MARY. Not so much as he does—a—somebody else.

CHAR. Why, *who* is there he could—

MARY. Well, upon my word—considering that I—
(*pauses awkwardly*).

CHAR. Why, what a fool I've been!

MARY. And are.

CHAR. But—oh! impossible!

MARY. Thank you.

CHAR. No, I don't mean *that*, because, of course, you are a charming young lady, and—

MARY. Thank you again.

CHAR. I mean it's impossible on *your* side. I really believe Talbot to be not half a bad fellow in the main, but his manner, his appearance, and—

MARY. Oh! handsome men are like the shows at the fairs, you see all the best outside.

CHAR. There's some truth in that, perhaps.

MARY. Talbot Champneys isn't either the fool he looks or affects to be. He's wonderfully good-hearted, I *know*, for I watched his manner only yesterday toward a crippled beggar boy when he thought no one saw him; and—and he snubs his pompous old father like a—like a—

CHAR. A young cub.

MARY. Well, a young cub's better than an old bear. I don't believe in surface—I like to know what's inside. You've often noticed confectioner's tarts, with their proud upper-crust—hollow mockeries—delusive shams; when the knife dives into their dim recesses what does it disclose? fruit, occasionally; syrup, seldom; flavor, *never*. Now Talbot's *not* a confectioner's tart!

CHAR. No, I should say he was more of the *cake*.

MARY. Never mind, I *like* cake. He may be eccentric, but his heart's in the right place.

CHAR. That means *you've* got it.

MARY. He hasn't told me so.

CHAR. Until you make him I—

MARY. Make him! well, you *are*—

SIR G. (*heard R.*) Don't mention it—a trifle.

MID. (*heard R.*) 'Pon my word, I'm downright—

SIR G. No, no; not at all.

CHAR. (*earnestly*) You will—you *will* make him declare himself, Mary Melrose, and make me the—(*Enter SIR*

GEOFFRY and MIDDLEWICK, *followed by* VIOLET. MARY and CHARLEY *sit up*, L.)

MID. I declare I wouldn't have done such a thing for any money. (*Aside*) I knew I should come to grief at them billiards.

SIR G. (*blandly*) My dear Mr. Middlewick, commonest thing with beginners. Cutting the billiard cloth with the cue is a trifling accident that might happen with any one. Don't mention it any more. (*Aside*) An awkward brute. Treated the table like his confounded counter.

MID. (*aside*) Serves me right, trying to play billiards, and poker-back pretending HE couldn't, and him all the time a regular dab. He's up to these grand games, but one of these days I'll *loore* him on to *skittles*—and *astonish* him.

SIR G. (*aside to* MIDDLEWICK, *pleased*) Middlewick, look, my dear sir. (*Points to* CHARLEY and MARY, *in conversation up stage on sociable*, L.) D'ye see that? Ha! ha! Seem rather interested in each other's conversation, eh? (*nudges him*).

MID. Why, anything more like spooning I—

SIR G. I hope, for *your* sake, it may be so; that girl is worth a thousand of her haughty cousin.

MID. (*seizing his hand*) You're right, Sir Geoffry. And I'm proud to hear a swell as *is* a swell give vent to such sentiments—they do you honor.

VIO. (*aside*) He means to wound me—to insult me. Mary cannot willingly have lent herself to so mean and poor a trick. *She* is honest—but he— (*enter* CLARISSA; *goes to* MIDDLEWICK.) How taken up with each other they seem. There isn't an atom of jealousy about my disposition, but I'd give the *world* to know what they're talking about. (*CHARLEY and MARY laugh.*) Now they're laughing. Perhaps at *me*. Oh! how I wish Mary wasn't poor—I'd have *such* a quarrel with her.

MID. (*aside; has been talking with* CLARISSA) A more sensible woman I never come across.

CLAR. (*aside*) A delightful person *if* a little eccentric.

MID. (*aside*) I'll find out what *she* thinks of my sentiments regarding Charley's fancy.

CLAR. (*aside*) I hope his evident attentions to *me* have not been noticed by my brother.

MID. (*seated by her*) Miss Clarissa—nice name Clarissa.

CLAR. (*coquettishly*) Think so?

MID. Yes—I wouldn't change it for no other. Your other name I *would*, though.

CLAR. (*aside*) What can he mean? These successful com-

mercial people are so blunt and business-like—can he possibly be about to— (*sighs*) Well, I must say I consider him rather a fine man.

SIR G. (*To VIOLET, who has been and is watching MARY and CHARLEY. SIR GEOFFRY has sat beside her*) Depend upon it, ill-assorted marriages are a mistake. For instance, we'll say, young Middlewick there—the poor lad's in a false position.

VIO. (*aside, in temper*) He *is*—sitting by *her*.

SIR G. A husband's relations, too, should not be ignored. Should the young man marry a lady, imagine her humiliation at the periodical visits of "Papa."

VIO. (*turning to him, a little nettled*) And yet *you* tolerate him here—make much of him.

SIR G. My dear Violet, in the country one is obliged to swallow one's feelings occasionally. I take good care no one shall ever meet him for whom I have the least—a—he-hem! (*aside*) Nearly putting my foot in it there. (*MIDDLEWICK and CLARISSA have been very earnestly conversing.*)

MID. Of course—of course when people get to a certain time of life they ought to settle. (*CHARLEY and MARY stroll off, C. and R.*)

CLAR. My sentiments precisely.

MID. And after all high birth's all very well, but if the other party has the *money*—

CLAR. Certainly—certainly. It may be radical and all that sort of thing, but give me intellect before mere family. And I am worldly enough to revere success—such as *yours*, for instance.

MID. (*aside*) She certainly is one of the most sensible women I—and after all they'd make an uncommon handsome couple—

CLAR. Eh?

MID. Charley and—

SIR G. (*abruptly, and annoyed*) Clarissa, my dear, where on earth has Talbot got to?

CLAR. (*rising, enraged at discovery of her mistake in MIDDLEWICK*) How should I know where he's got to!

SIR G. (*astonished*) Why, gracious me! My dear, I— (*aside to her, but aloud*) Remember, Clarissa, if you please, there are visitors present.

CLAR. Visitors indeed! Such canaille! (*Goes up, and exit.*)

MID. (*aside*) I heard you, my lady. So the old *one's* going in for snubs as well as—It's the last time me or Charley sets a foot in *this* 'ouse.

VIO. (*who has gone up to conservatory ; looking off*) How mean I feel, watching them. I'll—I'll leave this house to-morrow.

SIR G. (*aside*) What on earth's the matter with the woman? Something's annoyed her, but she mustn't be rude to my guests. I have one system with my son, my servants, and—yes, and my *sister*. She must come back at once and—Miss Melrose—Middlewick, excuse me a moment or two. (*Exit, R. D.*)

MID. All alone with Miss High-and-mighty! Hang me if I don't tackle her! You'll—you'll excuse *me*, Miss, but—

VIO. (*in horror*) Oh! pray don't say "Miss."

MID. (*softened*) Eh? (*aside*) not "Miss?" (*to her*) Well, then, we'll say "Voylet."

VIO. (*disgusted, but unable to restrain her amusement*) Mr. Middlewick, you really are *too* absurd! (*She moves toward R. door, and exits ; as she does so CHARLEY enters C., from L., and is about to follow her.*)

MID. (*aside*) If ever I set foot again in this house—(*catches CHARLEY by the arm, and turns him round abruptly toward himself.*)

CHAR. Why, dad, I—

MID. Charley, where are you a going of?

CHAR. (*annoyed*) O father! I really—

MID. (*severely*) Charles Middlewick, you're a going after that young lady.

CHAR. Well, sir, if I *am*?

MID. Charley, I don't want you and me to fall out. We never have yet. All's been smooth and pleasant with me hitherto, but when I *do* cut up rough, Charley, I cut up *that* rough as the road a being repaired afore the steam roller tackles it is simply a feather bed compared to your father.

CHAR. I don't understand you.

MID. (*with suppressed passion*) Obey me and my nature's olive oil; go *ag'in* me and it's *still* ile, but it's ile of *vitterel*.

CHAR. If, sir, you're alluding to my feelings toward Miss Melrose, I—

MID. *I am*. Think no more of her. Between you and her there's a gulf, Charles Middlewick, and that gulf's grammar. Perhaps you think I'm too ignorant to know what pride means. I'm *not*. If you ever cared for this stuck-up madam you must forget her. (*Determined*) She ain't my sort! never will be, and she sha'n't be my daughter-in-law neither.

CHAR. You have always prided yourself on allowing me my own way in everything—it was your *system*, as you

called it—and *now*, when it comes to a matter in which my whole future happiness is involved, you are cruel enough to—

MID. (*sharply*) Cruel only to be kind, Charley. You wouldn't marry a woman who despised your father? (CHARLEY *moves aside, ashamed; pause*) If you would, if you do, I'll cut you off with a shilling. I—I—(*in a rage*) Why don't you meet me half way and say you'll *obey* me, you shilly-shally numskull!

CHAR. (*in a passion*) You have no right to speak like this to me, if you *are* my father. (*Pause; MIDDLEWICK astonished.*)

MID. (*in softer voice*) He's right, he's *quite* right; calling names never did no good at any time. (*To him*) Leastaways *not* a numskull, Charley, of course; that was a "lapy lingo," a slip of the pen, you know. I'm speaking for your good. You're her equal in everything except *one*, Charley—I'm rich, but I'm a common, ignorant man. Wait, anyhow, until—until I—I—ain't here to disgrace you. (*Turns aside, breaks down.*)

CHAR. (*after slight pause*) My dear, kind dad, there's nothing in the world I wouldn't sacrifice to please you—

MID. (*turns to him pleased*) Ah!

CHAR. But in this instance—

MID. (*turning back grumpily*) Hah?

CHAR. I can never be happy without Violet Melrose.

MID. Then make up your mind to be miserable.

CHAR. The appearance of superciliousness which you imagine you—

MID. *Imagine*—but it ain't for you to bandy any further words with *me*. If you disappoint me, *disobey* me, *defy* me, take the consequences. Say good-bye to your father, live on Violet Melrose's money, but don't be surprised when your grand lady wife taunts you with your mean position and flings your vulgar father's butter shop in your teeth. (CHARLEY *attempts to speak*) Not a word—I've said my say, and what I *have* said, Charles Middlewick's, my ultipomatium. (*Exit, L. D.*)

CHAR. (*distracted*) Every word he said was true, and cut like a knife! How can I tell him that I know Violet's apparent supercilious manner is only on the surface? That—But *is* it? Am I fooling myself all the while? Does my blind admiration make me—I'll speak to her, learn the real depth of this seeming pride, and—(*is going, R.* MARY *enters, R.*)

MARY. Oh! such fun!

CHAR. (*disgusted*) Fun!

MARY. Yes, I've completely taken in the old gentleman.

CHAR. I believe you're *capable* of it.

MARY. With half a dozen joking remarks in admiration of *you*. I've completely put him off the scent. He firmly believes that we're awfully spoons, and that his son's only to ask Violet to be accepted.

CHAR. So you did *that*, did you?

MARY. Yes, I did, and Sir Geoffry's simply in raptures at the success of his system, as he calls it, and *Violet* the—

CHAR. (*in rage*) You've made matters ten times worse with your meddling interference. You—you've widened the gulf, and still further estranged us. But come what may I'll speak out and bring her to the point, if it's under the baronet's very nose! I— *Ugh!* (*With an exclamation of intense vexation at MARY, exits, R.*)

MARY. (*after a blank look*) Moral! Mary Melrose, my dear, for the rest of your natural life never attempt to do anything kind for anybody. I'll become supremely selfish, and settle down into a narrow-minded and highly acidulated old maid. (*Enter TALBOT, R., from C.*)

TAL. Who's that talking about old maids?

MARY. I was.

TAL. Why, you're all alone.

MARY. Yes, I like to be alone.

TAL. That means I'm to—

MARY. Oh! *no*, you're—

TAL. Nobody. Don't count. Thanks.

MARY. I didn't *say* that.

TAL. No, but you *meant* it.

MARY. Why?

TAL. Because you didn't *say* it. (*Pause.*)

MARY. What do you mean?

TAL. What I say.

MARY. What's that?

TAL. Nothing.

MARY. Then you mean nothing.

TAL. On the contrary, I mean a lot, but I can't say it.

MARY. Then I wouldn't try.

TAL. I won't. (*Slight pause*) I say, Miss Melrose, do you know I'm dreadfully afraid of you.

MARY. Am I so very terrible?

TAL. You're so fearfully sensible, you know—so satirical and cutting and "awfully clever," and I'm *not*, you know.

MARY. Not *what*, you know.

TAL. None of *that*, you know. I'm a—a—muff, that's

what I am. I haven't got a second idea. I don't believe I've got a *first*, but I'll *swear* I haven't a second.

MARY. Well, at all events, you're not conceited.

TAL. What on earth have I got to be conceited about? What are *my* accomplishments? I can play a fair game of billiards, though I'm too short-sighted for cricket. I can stick on the maddest horse that ever gladdened a coroner, and I can smoke like—like *Sheffield*. Not much to recommend one's self to a women, eh?

MARY. I don't know. Miss Melrose, for instance, my rich and handsome cousin, has a great admiration for the Guy Livingstone virtues.

TAL. Don't like her—at least, don't *admire* her.

MARY. Why not?

TAL. Because I've been commanded to. Private feelings ain't private soldiers—you can't order them about and drill them like dolls. Human nature's obstinate as a rule. Do you know how they get the pigs on board?

MARY. No.

TAL. Put their noses toward the vessel and then try and pull them away *backward*. The result is that they run up the plank into the vessel *immediately*. I'm a pig.

MARY. You don't say so?

TAL. And *my* sentiments are *pig-headed*, my governor's are *pig-tailed*—that's to say, old-fashioned—the old "school" strict obedience, marry according to *orders*, you know, eh? (*Nudges her*) Ha! Ha! Some of us know a trick worth two of that, eh?

MARY. Ha! ha! ha!

TAL. (*laughs with her*) You're a *sharp* one, *you* are. (*Nudges her.*)

MARY. So are *you*.

TAL. *Am* I, though?

MARY. Only in the *elbow*. Suppose you sit a little further off; you never crowd up so closely to Violet.

TAL. No, I'm not given to *poaching*.

MARY. Poaching! *Eggs?*

TAL. Eggs be—*hatched!* Haven't you seen Charley Middlewick loves her as much as—as—(*aside*) I'll go it now—I'm wound up *to* go it, and go it I *will*.

MARY. As much as *what?*

TAL. As I love *you*.

MARY. (*rising*) Mr. Champneys!

TAL. (*rising*) No, no, no, I don't mean *that*.

MARY. *No?*

TAL. Yes, yes, I *do*, but in another way. I mean he doesn't love her *half* as much as I love *you*.

MARY. You don't know your own mind.

TAL. Don't want to. I want to know yours.

MARY. You don't mean half you say.

TAL. No, I don't. I mean it *all*.

MARY. Your father'd disown you.

TAL. So he might if I owned *you*.

MARY. You silly boy, what are you talking about? I haven't a penny in the world.

TAL. Even if you did possess that humble but heavy coin, it could scarce be considered *capital*, could it? A start at housekeeping on a ha'penny apiece would be a trifle rash, not to say risky.

MARY. Housekeeping, indeed! Well, I like your impudence—

TAL. I *adore* yours.

MARY. I never was impertinent in my life.

TAL. Then don't contradict. When I say, "Be mine," don't say "Sha'n't."

MARY. I won't.

TAL. Won't *what*?

MARY. Say "sha'n't."

TAL. (*delighted*) Do you mean it?

MARY. Talbot, you've had too much wine.

TAL. I admit it.

MARY. You *have* admitted it. If your father suspected this he'd cut you off with a shilling.

TAL. That's fivepence apiece better than your penny. We're getting on.

MARY. You quite take one's breath away—I don't know what to say.

TAL. Let me say it for you.

MARY. No, no, I never was proposed to before.

TAL. How do you like it?

MARY. But I've *read* about people proposing and—and—(*innocently*) They've always gone on their knees.

TAL. I'll go on my *head* if it'll only please you.

MARY. No, no, don't, it might give way.

TAL. Well, as far as a knee goes—*here* goes—there! (*kneels*).

MARY. And then the lover always made a beautiful speech.

TAL. I know. Most adorable of your sex, a cruel parent commands me to love another—I *won't*—I CAN'T—I

adore *you*—you alone. I despise heiresses, I despise Parliamentary honors, a public career, and all that *bosh*. (SIR GEOFFRY and MIDDLEWICK have appeared; SIR GEOFFRY now staggers and supports himself on MIDDLEWICK'S arm) I prefer love in a cottage. I *like* love—I like a cottage, where a fellow can smoke where he likes, and—

SIR G. (*bursting out*) You shall have your wish, sir. You shall have your love and your cottage, and your smoke and—and—(*breaking down*) Talbot—Talbot, what does this mean?

TAL. It means that I've made my own bargain—you can't call it an ugly one, can you? (SIR GEOFFRY *overcome*.)

MID. (*almost unable to control his amusement*) Never mind, Champneys, it might have been worse. She's a proper sort, is Mary.

SIR G. Don't "Champneys" ME, sir. I'll—I'll turn him out!

MID. Well, he hasn't turned out *himself* quite as you fancied he would, eh? Ha! ha! ha! Who was right in his system *now*, eh? Ha! ha! ha! (*As he is laughing CHARLEY heard*.)

CHAR. (*without R.*) My darling, I'll put the whole matter right in a moment. (*Enter CHARLEY, holding VIOLET'S hand, C., from R.; pause abruptly on seeing the others.*)

MID. W-w-what's *this*, Charles Middlewick? Who is this you are—

CHAR. This, father, is *my wife*, or *will be*, when I have your consent.

MID. (*overcome with rage*) Why, you confounded—

SIR G. (*taking up same tone*) Insolent, presuming young upstart, why, I—

MID. (*in rage to SIR GEOFFRY*) Don't bully my son, sir; don't bully my son—that's *my* department.

SIR G. Ha! ha! ha! Finely *your* system has succeeded, eh? Ha! ha! ha!

MID. We're insulted, defied, both of us. (*Excitedly*) Turn your disobedient cub adrift if you've courage to stick to your principles.

SIR G. And kick out your cad of a lad if your sentiments are not a snare and a delusion. (CHARLEY and VIOLET, TALBOT and MARY, all in a state of suppressed excitement, have been earnestly talking in an undertone during the blustering row of the fathers. CLARISSA enters.)

MID. So I will, sir, so I will. Charles Middlewick, madam, that boy's no longer any son of mine. If you accept him you blight his prospects.

CLAR. Mr. Middlewick, are you aware that Miss Melrose is—

SIR G. (*violently*) Don't you dare to interfere, madam.

VIO. I *have* accepted him, sir, and I will not blight his prospects. (MIDDLEWICK *overcome with rage.*)

SIR G. (*to* TALBOT) And as for *you*, you impostor!

TAL. That'll do. I won't trouble you any longer. I'm off.

SIR G. Off, sir! where?

TAL. That's *my* business.

CHAR. (*taking* TALBOT'S *hand*) Yes, *our* business.

MID. Oh! yes—you can go with him if you please, and a good riddance.

SIR G. Go—go and starve.

TAL. *That* we can do without your permission, anyhow. You've kicked us out remember, father, because, being grown men, we've set our affections where our hearts have guided us—not your *heads*. And—and—Charley, finish it. I'm not an orator, and don't want to be.

CHAR. (*to girls*) We'll prove ourselves worthy of you by our own unaided exertions, and will *neither* of us ask you to redeem your promise till we've shown ourselves worthy of your esteem. We can get our living in London, and rely upon it *you'll* never hear of our distress should we suffer it.

CLAR. (*distressed*) Talbot, my dear nephew, you—

SIR G. (*violently*) Hold your tongue!

VIO. (*half crying, to the fathers*) You're a couple of hard-hearted monsters, and I don't know which I hate the most.

MARY. No—nor which is the uglier of the two. (CHARLEY *taking farewell of* VIOLET, *kisses her hand*. TALBOT *tries to get at* MARY; *intercepted by his aunt.*)

SIR G. (*aside, violently shaking* MIDDLEWICK'S *hand*) You've acted nobly, sir—you—you're a downright Roman father.

MID. (*reciprocating*) *You're another.* (*The two old men shaking each other's hands violently but evidently overcome by mingled emotions.* TALBOT *pushes his aunt aside, and flings his arms around* MARY, *kissing her audibly*; CLARISSA *falls on to ottoman; on the movement of the scene*)

ACT DROP.

SECOND PICTURE.—CLARISSA *discovered fainting*; VIOLET *holding scent bottle to her nose*. MARY *at back waving handkerchief on terrace, off R.*; SIR GEOFFRY *in easy-chair overcome*. MIDDLEWICK, *with hands thrust deep into his pockets, standing doggedly.*

ACT III

SCENE.—*The third floor at MRS. PATCHAM'S. A very shabby sitting-room in a third-rate lodging-house. A door down, L. H.; a door, C., leading to landing; a door, R. H., up; fireplace and mantel-shelf, L. up; a shabby old arm-chair by fireplace; a table, R. C., on which are remains of breakfast—very common teapot with broken spout, a small stale remains of a loaf, two egg-cups, with the shells of eggs in them, brown sugar in a cup, etc.; small table, with penny bottle of ink, pens and paper; a few books up, R. H. A tapping heard at the door, repeated, and then BELINDA, a slatternly lodging-house servant, puts her head in.*

BEL. Was you ringing? Please, was you a—*(enters, carrying an empty coal box)* neither of 'em here. Bother them cinders, if I had my way with 'em I'd chuck 'em out of winder instead of having to carry 'em down-stairs as careful as coals. Coals! Precious few of *them* the young gents has, and prices a rising dreadful. For they ARE gents, if they do buy only kitchen ones and has 'em in by the yunderd. What a fire! it's as pinched up as—*(is about to give it a vigorous poke when she is restrained by the entrance of TALBOT. He is shabby, and a great contrast to his former showy self)*.

TAL. *(sharply)* Now then!

BEL. *(turns with the poker in her hand)* Eh?

TAL. What are you going to do?

BEL. Only going to—

TAL. Of course. Strike a little fire like that, it's cowardly.

BEL. Shall I put some more coal on?

TAL. Certainly not.

BEL. You wouldn't let it go out?

TAL. Why not? It's a free country.

BEL. *(aside)* Sometime I think they're both a little—*(touches her head)*. It's too much study, that's what it is. *(Sweeps up the hearth.)*

TAL. *(aside)* Capital girl, this; simple and honest. A downright daughter of the soil, and carries her parentage in her countenance. Perhaps you had better put a pinch or two on. Mr. Middlewick will be in directly. *(She goes into room.)* He'll be cold, poor fellow, though, of course, he'll swear he isn't. I'm getting uneasy about Charley. Ever

since I was seedy, and he sat up so much with me, I've noticed a change in him; if he doesn't improve I shall— (*crash of coals heard*). There's a suspicious, not to say a shallow, sound about those coals. (BELINDA *enters with shovel of coals.*)

BEL. I tell you what, sir, your coals are dreadful low.

TAL. Low! *Blackguardly*, I call them!

BEL. I can easily order some more when I go to Loppit's!

TAL. Just so. Whether Loppit would see it in the same light's a question. There is already a trifling account which—

BEL. Oh! Loppit can wait.

TAL. He *can*—SHORT weight. By the way, I saw some boxes in the hall.

BEL. Yes, missus has gone out of town for a fortnight, and—(*is about to put on the lot of coal*).

TAL. Gently—a bit at a time. (*Takes up a piece with the tongs*). There—there—(*business*) I say, Belinda, if Loppit were to call his coals "not so dusty" it would be paying them a compliment, wouldn't it?

BEL. Ha! ha! ha! Well, you *are* a funny gent, you are. (*As TALBOT makes up the fire CHARLEY enters. He too is shabby and looks worn. He carries some papers, and MSS.*)

CHAR. Halloa! Talbot, old man, what are you doing now?

TAL. Giving Belinda a lesson in domestic economy—you know a severe winter always hardens the coal-merchant's heart!

CHAR. Yes, yes. (*Takes off gloves and hat.*)

TAL. And they're simply going up like—like—

CHAR. Smoke!

TAL. There! (*Has done fire, stands before it, facing CHARLEY; BELINDA takes back shovel into room.*) I consider I make a first-rate fire.

CHAR. Yes, you don't make a bad *screen*.

TAL. I beg your pardon. (*Moves aside.*)

CHAR. Don't mention it. The attitude and position are thoroughly insular and Britannic. It is a remarkable fact that an Englishman who never turns his back on the fire of an enemy invariably does it with his friends.

TAL. (*aside*) We've got our "sarcastic stop" on this morning, eh? Well, Charley, I suppose you did no good with Gripner?

CHAR. I had a highly interesting interview with that worthy publisher. I thought *you* thought that the poem I commenced at Cologne for amusement had some stuff in it!

TAL. *Stuff!* Ha—*full* of it.

CHAR. Exactly. Partial friends have declared I had a real vein of poetry, but Gripner—ha! ha! *He*—well, he disguised his sentiments by assuring me poetry was a mere drug in the market. He'd also thrown his eye on those social sketches I'd thought were rather smart, but he said he knew at least fifty people who can roll out such things by the ream. However, he's given us a dozen pages apiece for his new gazetteer. We begin in the middle of M— you can start at Mesopotamia, and work your way on at ten shillings a column. (*Hands him papers.*) It's bread and cheese!

TAL. I should think so. Ten shillings a column. (*Unfolds papers; printed sheets.*) By Jove, they *are* columns, though. Regular Dukes of York. Penny a lining's coining compared to it. I can't say at the moment I know *much* about Mesopotamia, but—

CHAR. I remembered old Mother Patcham had a dilapidated gazetteer down-stairs, so I borrowed it, and you can copy the actual facts.

TAL. Just so. Put it all in different language.

CHAR. Yes, the more indifferent the better.

TAL. Her book's about twenty years old; never mind—I'll double the population everywhere—that'll do it.

CHAR. Talking about population, I've had an interview with the agent for emigration to Buenos Ayres—he rather pooh-poohed us as emigrants. They don't want gentlemen.

TAL. We don't appear in particular request anywhere. It seems absurd to be hard up in the Cattle Show week.

CHAR. Our governors are up in town, I'll swear.

TAL. Mine never missed the show for forty years. I can see him critically examining the over-fed monsters—punching the pigs and generally disturbing the last hours of the vaccine victims.

CHAR. Whom I envy. What a glorious condition is theirs—fed on the daintiest food—watched and waited on like princes—admired by grazing—I mean gazing crowds, and—

TAL. Eventually eaten, don't forget that. I'll go as far as the *sheep* with you, they *can* do what *we* can't.

CHAR. What's that?

TAL. Get a living out of their *pens*.

CHAR. Beginning to joke now. You're a changed being, Talbot.

TAL. Yes. Genuine "hard-upishness" is a fine stimulant to the imagination. The sensation of **four healthy appetites** a day, with—

CHAR. The power of only partially appeasing *two*—

TAL. Exactly—makes a fellow—

CHAR. *Thin.* Our cash is assuming infinitesimal proportions, Talbot. We must still further reduce our commissariat. I've been calculating, and I find that henceforth bacon at breakfast must be conspicuous by its absence.

TAL. Bacon—the word suggests philosophy, so with many thanks for past favors, “bye-bye, Bacon.”

CHAR. When we first parted with our convertible property, we had hope in our hearts and cash in our money box. Now things don't look rosy we must bow to circumstances. “Tempora Mutantur.”

TAL. “Nos Et mutamur in illis.”

CHAR. Which being loosely translated—

TAL. Means that we must give up the *Times* and take in the *Telegraph*.

CHAR. We've parted with a good many things, Talbot, but we've stuck to *one*—our word. We've never appealed to a relation.

TAL. Except, of course, a certain avuncular relative who—

CHAR. Shall be nameless. Just so—but our governors must have discovered by this time that our determination was no empty boast, and Violet and Mary have never heard a word from either of us. No one can say we've shown the white feather.

TAL. One minute—I *must* clean my boots. (*Takes up boots, and brings blacking-bottle from corner with a bit of stick in it, and boot brushes.*)

CHAR. Why on earth do you always begin to—

TAL. (*blacking boots*) Always begin to clean my boots when you talk about Violet and Mary? Because I feel it's necessary at the mention of their names to work off my superabundant and irrepressible emotion. I feel if I don't have a go in at my boots, I shall do some awful—(*begins to brush violently*). Now go it!

CHAR. Do you know, Talbot, I could almost swear I saw Violet to-day?

TAL. You don't say so?

CHAR. And I *vow* I saw Mary.

TAL. Hah! (*Brushing with tremendous violence.*)

CHAR. I don't *think* they saw *me*, but—

TAL. (*at the boot*) What a *shine* there'll be in a moment!

CHAR. For I dodged behind a cab—(*enter BELINDA, D.F.*)

TAL. And got away without—

BEL. (*brusquely*) What are you doing of? Drop 'them boots.

TAL. Belinda!

BEL. I clean the lodgers' boots. And it's my place to clean *yours*—if you are a third floorer. (*Takes boot and brush from TALBOT.*)

TAL. (*aside*) A third floorer!

CHAR. Belinda, don't talk as if you were reporting a prize fight. (*BELINDA cleans boots.*)

TAL. And deal gently with the *heels*; they won't be trifled with.

CHAR. I've got a deuce of a headache, Talbot, and as I want a good'afternoon's dig at the gazetteer, I'll go and lie down a bit in my den.

TAL. Do. I heard you walking up and down the room half the night; you're getting *ill*!

CHAR. Not a bit, old man, not a bit. (*Goes toward door*) Nerves a little shaky, that's all—that's all. (*Exit, D. F.*)

BEL. I tell you what—it's my opinion *you* wasn't half as ill as you'll soon have Mr. Middlesex!

TAL. *Middlewick*, Belinda. It's the natural obstinacy of your nature to call people out of their names. My name being Champneys, you call me Chimneys—*had* it been Chimneys you'd have had it Chimbley, of course. (*Aside*) She's right, though. I'll go and ask Barnard to come round and see him. (*Takes up hat*) I shall be in soon. By the way, those breakfast things are *not* an ornament—if, in a lucid interval, you should feel disposed to take them down-stairs, I shall *not* feel offended. (*Exit, D. F.*)

BEL. He's a queer young gent, that; so are both of 'em. But, somehow, I've took to 'em—took to 'em *tremendous*. I wonder who they are. I'm sure they're *gentlemen* 'cos they can't do nothing for a living. Then they don't bully a poor lodging-house slavey. "Slavey"—that's what they call me, but, somehow, it don't seem rude like from *them*. Missis says they're "under a cloud," she thinks, and she's always in a regler fluster every Saturday till they've paid their rent. Ha, well, they knows their own business (*the door opens and SIR GEOFFRY enters, then MIDDLEWICK. BELINDA is placing the things on tray*) best, I suppose. Couldn't stand by and see him a blacking his—

SIR G. He-hem! (*BELINDA starts.*)

MID. (*other side of her*) He-hem!

BEL. Bless us, who are *you*? (*retires up a little. The two old gentlemen look round the room with a rueful expression of countenance, then they look at each other blankly.*)

MID. Well!

SIR G. Well!

MID. A—here we are.

SIR G. Confound it, sir, don't talk like a clown.

MID. I won't. (*Aside, miserably*) I don't feel like one. Pantaloon, and a worse treated one than ornery's more in my way a deal.

SIR G. Why—why it's a mere garret.

MID. Where did you expect to find 'em? At Claridge's Hotel? or the Langham? Perhaps you hoped to see 'em driving mail *feeatons* in the Park or a lolling out of a swell club winder in Pall Mall. Garret as you call it, I don't see as it's so oncomfortable.

SIR G. (*in broken voice*) I'm glad you think so, sir, I'm glad you think so.

MID. (*aside, in tone of pity*) Poor dear boy, to think he should have come to this!

SIR G. (*affecting harshness*) Not that I relent in any way. Oh! no, no!

MID. (*assuming same tone*) Nor I, nor I! As they make their beds so they must lie.

BEL. (*overhearing*) Bless your 'art, sir, they never make their own beds.

MID. He-hem! (*Aside*) The servant. The very image of the gal as waited on me when I lived in a attic in Pulteney Street. It's my belief as nature keeps a mold for lodging-house servant gals and turns 'em out 'olesale like buttons. She's the identical same gal—same to a smudge. (*To her*) These young men here, are they pretty comfortable and all that?

BEL. (*aside*) Pumping! Who are they? (*To them*) Pretty well.

MID. Do they—do they *dine* at home?

BEL. No—they breakfusses!

SIR G. Oh! they breakfusses. Is that—or rather *was* that their breakfast?

BEL. Yes.

MID. (*aside; taking up eggs*) Shop 'uns. Sixteen a shilling. I knows 'em. (*Puts it down*) To think Charley should have to—(*breaks down*).

SIR G. (*through his glasses*) Good heavens! what dreadful looking butter!

MID. (*faintly*) Dossit—my dear sir—inferior Dossit! (*Aside*) Precious inferior.

SIR G. Dorset, man, Dorset.

MID. (*in rage*) Come here, I say, you know—you may be

at home in all matters of *hetiquette* and *genehallogy*—and such like, but dammy, *do* let me know something of butter. I tell you that it's *Dossit—Dossit*—that's what it *is*—and what's more it's a two *hounce* pat!

SIR G. (*stiffly*) On such a minute matter of professional detail I cannot, of course, attempt to argue (*goes up*).

MID. (*aside*) Now that's all put on. Inside he's a suppressed *hearthquake*. He's a longing to throw his arms round his boy; but he wants me to give in first. (*Talks aside to BELINDA.*)

SIR G. (*aside, up*) His rage is only a safety valve for his pent-up affection; poor fellow, he'd like me to propose a truce, but it's not for a man in my position to succumb to sentiment. I've only to wait, and his feelings, which are stronger—I may say *coarser*—than mine are sure to melt.

MID. (*to BELINDA*) And how's their appetites—pretty 'arty?

BEL. Fine. I often hear 'em telling one another what they've had for dinner, but when I see the way they devours their tea—do you know I sometimes fancy—

MID. Yes?

BEL. As they've had no dinner at all.

MID. (*after slight pause, in a low voice*) No—no dinner at all. (*Turns aside, and places his hand at his heart for a moment, shading his eyes with his other one*) Here—you seem a decent young woman—here's a half-sovereign—not a word. We're friends of *friends* of these young men. Speak out truthfully. Did you ever hear them speak of—of their relations?

SIR G. Yes, yes, *friends*, belongings—a—speak out!

BEL. Oh! yes, and more than once by *accident*—for I ain't got time for listening—I heard 'em say they'd rather *starve* than write to 'em.

MID. (*overcome*) *Did they—did they?*

SIR G. (*proudly*) That was firmness—pride!

MID. From *your* point of view. Being a tradesman, *I* call it obstinacy.

SIR G. Fostered in *your* case by a system of absurd laxity.

MID. (*aside*) And that to the man as he called a Roman father!

BEL. But at one time—when one of 'em was taken ill—

SIR G. } What!

MID. }

SIR G. Ill! ill! girl—not VERY ill?

MID. (*almost fiercely*) Which was it?

SIR G. Yes—speak, woman— which — not — not—the shorter one, the one with the light hair, who—

BEL. Yes, him.

SIR G. (*overcome ; in broken voice*) But he—he *got better* ?

BEL. Yes. Thanks to the other gent who waited on him hand and foot, and never took his clothes off for a week, looking after his friend and attending to him for all the world as if he'd been his brother. (SIR GEOFFRY *goes to MIDDLEWICK, grasps his hand, with a sob aside. MIDDLEWICK silently returns the grasp each holding head down.*)

MID. (*after pause ; low voice*) And—and the other—who—who helped his sick friend so—so noble.

BEL. Well, it's *my* opinion he's in a worse way than the other, though he won't own it.

MID. (*very faintly, and in grief*) No—no—(*staggers slightly back. SIR GEOFFRY supports him.*)

SIR G. (*gently, aside to MIDDLEWICK*) Come—come, old friend, be a man (*giving way*), be a man as—as *I* am—don't give way. I'm firm—firmer than ever. (*Blows his nose to hide his emotion.*)

MID. What—what makes you fancy so ?

BEL. Well, when he first come he was cheerful and nappy, but bit by bit—as he got shabbier—he grew quieter like—and sometimes I've spoke to him three or four times afore he seemed to know I was a speaking, and—

MID. (*aside*) Poor boy ! poor boy !

SIR G. (*aside*) And *he* helped and nursed Talbot—I wish 'd come here sooner.

BEL. (*aside*) Who *can* they be ? I don't like leaving 'em here, and all the lodgers' private papers about. There's a sort of county court look about the short one. I've seen oailiffs enough in my time, and it ain't a bit unlikely as—

SIR G. Middlewick, something must be done. We—we mustn't *forget* ourselves and become *maudlin*, you know.

MID. (*pulling himself together*) No, no ; certainly not.

SIR G. After all, we did everything for *them*, and they showed a shameful return.

MID. (*convincing himself*) Yes, yes, so they did, so they did.

SIR G. Defied us.

MID. No mistake about it, and when you turned 'em out—

SIR G. *You* turned them out.

MID. You suggested it first.

SIR G. Well, well, they've eaten the leek.

MID. Ye-es, there ain't much nourishment in leeks, though I admit, *relishy*.

SIR G. I see you're giving way. (*Sharply*) You're *thawing*.

MID. *Me* "thawring!" not *me*. But you was saying as something must be done, and I says ditto. Anonymous, of course.

SIR G. Quite so; permit *me* to arrange it. Young woman, there's something in your face thoroughly honest—the frequent contact with cinders or whatever it may be, cannot conceal your innate truthfulness; your face is a picture, and I am old-fashioned enough not to object to a picture in a black frame. I prefer it.

BEL. (*aside*) Soft sawder. Something's a coming.

SIR G. In the first place, you musn't say anything of our visit, and when the young men come in you must give them an envelope.

MID. Two—*two* henvelopes.

BEL. (*standing back*) Not if i know it. (*Aside*) A summons, of course. (*To them*) I don't know neither of you gentlemen, but I wouldn't do nothing as would bring any harm to our third floorers for nothing as you could offer me. And, perhaps, you'll be good enough to take back your 'arf crown.

SIR G. (*aside*) Remarkable! But I never *could* understand the lower classes.

MID. (*aside*) If that 'arf sovereign doesn't blossom into a fi-pun note before the day's out, my name ain't Middlewick.

SIR G. But whatever you do don't mention that—what's that? some one coming up the stairs?

BEL. Yes.

SIR G. We musn't be seen.

MID. Not for the world. What's this? (*Goes to door L.*)

BEL. That's what the gents calls their *honnium gatherum*—where they keeps—

SIR G. Is this Talbot's—I mean Mr.—

BEL. Chimneys' room? yes, but you musn't—(SIR GEOFFRY *bolts into door R. as a tap is heard, D. F., and shuts door. MIDDLEWICK is peeping into room L., when a tapping is heard and a loud He-hem.*)

MID. Get us out of this without the lodgers seeing us and I'll—(*bolts into room as door in flat slowly opens; he does not see who it is. Enter MISS CLARISSA, dressed in walking dress and carrying a reticule.*)

CLAR. Young woman, are the gentlemen who lodge up here both out?

BEL. Yes'm. (*Aside*) One is, and 'tother's a lying down and don't want worrying.

CLAR. Phew! (*Sits; aside*) This is the servant, the young woman Mr. Warrington, the detective, told me was "a good

sort"—an odd phrase, but expressive. If I hadn't employed him the poor young men might have done something dreadful, with their pride and their sense of independence and all that.

BEL. Was you wanting to see either of 'em?

CLAR. Well, no, not just now. (*Aside*) Geoffry, after discovering everything by shamefully intercepting one of Mr. Warrington's letters, thinks to frighten me with threats of even stopping my allowance and turning me out of his house if I communicate with Talbot. Bah! he's my own nephew, and he sha'n't starve whilst his Aunt Clarissa's got a penny in the world. His father may act like a brute, and so may Mr. Middlewick, but—ugh! *Cattle Show*, indeed. Coming to stare at a collection of adipose sheep, all sleep and suet; at islands of lean in oceans of obesity, called by courtesy cows; and a parcel of plethoric and apoplectic pigs, their own sons all the while wasting away to shadows. (*Brings out fowl, ready trussed, from reticule*) Mrs. Patcham's out of town, isn't she?

BEL. Yes'm.

CLAR. Then there wont be any one in the kitchen?

BEL. Not a soul, 'cept me and the beetles.

CLAR. Very good. Your fire's in, of course?

BEL. Trust me. Missus and the fire ain't never out together.

CLAR. Very good—then follow *me*. (*Exit D. F., carrying the fowl; leaves bonnet on a chair.*)

BEL. Here I say—(*goes to D. F.*) *She* don't mean no harm. She's a relation of one of the gents, *she is*. (*listens*) She skips down them kitchen stairs like a—(*distant knock heard at front door*) These breakfast things 'll be here all day. Bother the knocker! (*takes up things on a tray; a door slams*) Oh! Mrs. Radcliffe's opened the front door for me. A nice woman that. Always ready to save a poor girl's legs. Bless my 'art, I forgot all about them two parties in ambush. Well, they must wait until I—(*Enter D. F., VIOLET, then MARY.*)

VIO. This is the third floor, I believe. That very nice old lady who opened the door said that—(*both girls timid*)

MARY. Oh! if you please, is Mr. Champneys in?

VIO. Or Mr. Middlewick?

BEL. No, miss.

BOTH. How are they?

BEL. Well, really—a—

VIO. They are not ill—Mr. Middlewick is not *ill*?

BEL. No, miss.

VIO. (*aside to MARY*) Isn't it a dreadful place?

MARY. Poor dear Talbot!

VIO. O Charley! (*To BELINDA*) Are they likely to be long?

BEL. Can't say.

MARY. Are the gentlemen out much?

BEL. Yes, miss.

VIO. Late?

BEL. Don't know. They both has latch keys.

VIO. Mary, we'll wait till they come in, and surprise them.

MARY. If it's *proper*. (*To BELINDA*) I suppose they never have any visitors?

BEL. Well, as to *that* you see—

VIO. (*aside*) The girl seems confused. I almost wish I hadn't come. I always was of a suspicious nature. I can't help it. Mary believes in everybody, but I—(*noise in room R.*) What's that?

BEL. N—nothing, miss—It's a printing machine next door. When it's at work it throbs like a regler *'edache*.

VIO. Who's room is that?

BEL. Mr. Middlesex's.

MARY. *Middlewick*. I've a very good mind to—(*moves toward door. BELINDA hastily jumps before it.*)

BEL. You mustn't go there.

MARY. (*aside to VIOLET*) Do you see her alarm?

VIO. Am I blind?

MARY. No, but perhaps we both *have been*. (*Screams at sight of bonnet on chair; in a low voice to VIOLET*) Look—look there!

VIO. (*in horror*) A human bonnet. Girl! (*seizes BELINDA by the arm*) Don't prevaricate. Speak the truth and I'll give you more money than you ever had in your life!

BEL. (*half crying*) I don't know what's a coming to everybody this blessed day—I wish missus would come back.

VIO. Who's is this?

BEL. A lady's, of course.

VIO. You hear, Mary.

MARY. (*tearfully*) Oh! don't speak to me!

BEL. But she's a nice sort of woman as ever lived and she says she's as fond of—

VIO. Of which?

BEL. Of *both* of them.

MARY. The wretch!

VIO. This is no place for us, Mary. (*Noise heard room, L.*) (*with a half scream*) That's not a printing machine.

MARY. I will see who—I mean *what's* in that room. Stand aside, girl.

BEL. 'Scuse me, that's the gents' private apartment—their *hominum gatherum*, and—

VIO. Come, Mary. We've been two fools, dear, and we—
(*As they go toward D. F., CHARLEY and TALBOT enter ; slight pause.*)

TAL. Mary!

CHAR. Violet! Can I believe my eyes!

VIO. *I* can. AND my ears. So can Mary.

MARY. Implicitly.

CHAR. But. Violet, this is so unexpected—

VIO. (*sarcastically*) Evidently.

CHAR. So—so bewildering. So inexplicable, and—

TAL. So jolly rum!

MARY. (*coldly*) Quite so.

CHAR. But how—how did you—

TAL. Did you find us out?

VIO. Never mind. Suffice is to say, Mr. Middlewick, that—

MARY. That we *have*—

VIO. "*Found you out.*" (*The girls curtsey ; the men dumb-founded.*)

CHAR. You saw me in the street.

VIO. Probably. We were foolish enough to think you—we thought your silence proof of your truth—we deceived ourselves—

MARY. Don't, Violet! Where's your spirit? Let us leave them to their own consciences, if they *have* any. This is evidently a well-trained confederate. Henceforth we are strangers.

VIO. *Utter* strangers. (*They exit D. F.*)

TAL. (*after slight pause*) What have you been saying to those ladies?

BEL. Nothing. But they called me a "coffederate." Now, a "coffederate's a man as knows the conjuror and says he doesn't," and I'm not a going to bear it. Look here, ladies, I—(*Exit D. F.*) (*CHARLEY and TALBOT look at each other.*)

CHAR. This is some conspiracy. Somebody's been vilifying us—they sha'n't leave without one *word* of explanation, though. (*Exit D. F.*) (*TALBOT goes to fire-place, his back to the door of the room where his father is.*)

TAL. The girls don't mean it—can't mean it. Unless our determined silence has seemed suspicious, and—slightly altering the poet—suspicion ever haunts the *female* mind—always admitting there *is* such a thing as a female mind, which I'm beginning to doubt,—(*leans head on arm on*

mantel-piece.) (SIR GEOFRY *opens door a little ; it hides him from TALBOT.*)

SIR G. (*to himself*) They've all gone. Not one syllable could I distinguish ; but women's voices, and at high words, were only too evident. This comes of leaving two headstrong lads to the temptations of town. O Talbot ! I knew you were not a genius, but I did hope you would never forget you were a gentleman ! (CHARLEY *re-enters quickly ; as he does so SIR GEOFFRY steps back, nearly closing the door ; the side of the room is set obliquely so that he is perfectly visible to audience, though unseen by those on the stage.* MIDDLEWICK *enters a little way.*)

CHAR. Well, upon my life, they're a pretty pair.

MID. (*aside*) Ah, I was sure I heard two of 'em.

CHAR. (*flinging himself into a chair*) A couple of beauties, I *do* think.

MID. (*aside*) So do I. A nice noisy couple whoever they were. Pretty acquaintances for two young chaps as bragged of their fidelity !

TAL. Fact is they've got tired of waiting for us. They see we're poor—and are likely to keep so. What a confounded draft there is from that—(*goes to close door of his room, R. H. ; SIR GEOFFRY advances ; MIDDLEWICK enters further simultaneously ; both indignant.*)

MID. Sir Geoffry, you heard, of course.

SIR G. Not a word could I distinguish, for my hearing is utterly failing me. But you heard women's voices ?

MID. Distinctly—even through the row of some confounded machine—a printer's, I fancy—next door.

SIR G. Though we could not distinguish a word your female friends said, some of *yours* reached us, and but too plainly indicated the familiar terms which—O Talbot ! I had hoped there would be still something of dignity and self-denial to qualify your absurdly Quixotic conduct, but I was mistaken. From your birth I mapped out your future, and hoped and prayed it should be a bright one, and now I find my son, my only child, who should have been my joy and pride, prove himself not only willful and wrong-headed—I could have looked over *that*—but a *profligate*, and that, Talbot Champneys, I never *will* forgive.

CHAR. Don't speak, Talbot, let *me*. So, sirs, you have been playing the spy upon your sons.

MID. Don't exasperate me, Charles Middlewick, and no smug-faced shamming. We'd hunted you out, ready to forgive everything, but—a—there—I knew you were thoughtless, careless, *reckless* even, but I never dreamt you had a bit of vice in your whole nature.

CHAR. (*aside*) This is too much ; the last straw breaks—

TAL. Who knows this *is* the last straw ? After what I've heard recently I'm prepared for an entire stack.

CHAR. *You* are not the only people who have misjudged us.

TAL. No ; others who were here but recently actually—

SIR G. Pray, sir, spare us the opinions of such persons. Talbot, I—I blush for you.

MID. There's no shame in you. You're worse than your companions who were here just now.

TAL. (*sharply*) What do you mean by that ?

MID. Eh ?

TAL. Ladies whom you will mention with respect, if you please. If we have been ill-treated by them it is not for you, no, sir, nor *you* (*to his father*) to speak slightly of them *before us*.

SIR G. (*aside*) Brazening it out. To think that six months in this abominable city should have obliterated all sense of shame, all sense of self-respect. Oh ! London, London, what a lengthy list of such sad cases lies at your debasing door !

CHAR. For my part, as regards Miss Melrose—

MID. Don't mention her. (*Aside*) How dare he speak of that regler lady and true woman in the very teeth of such—bah !

CHAR. I am sorry to see you still bear a resentment in that quarter.

TAL. And as I should never care for any woman but Mary—

SIR G. (*indignantly*) You insult me by mentioning her name at such a time.

TAL. And as all is over between us—

SIR G. Ha ! ha ! I should think so. Eh, Middlewick ?

MID. Depend upon it, the cousins know *all*.

SIR G. Ay, ay, trust a woman for finding out all she wants, and sometimes a deuced deal more. *This* accounts for their suddenly departing for the Continent last week.

MID. Of course ; where no doubt they're endeavoring to dispel their sorrow.

SIR G. Just so. In the vortex of Parisian society.

MID. Strolling up and down the bully-yards and the bore de boolong. Showing them saller-faced foreigners what good, 'olesome looking English gals are.

SIR G. Yes, yes. (*Warming.*) I can see them.

MID. (*working it up*) So can I.

SIR G. The dear creatures ! That puss, Mary, has quite

wound herself round my heart. An artful, winning little beauty.

MID. And as for the 'aughty one, we've got that friends I wouldn't see her wronged or insulted for—Ugh!

SIR G. Aah! (*with exclamations of disgust, they go up.*
CHARLEY and TALBOT gaze blankly at each other, both stupefied.)

TAL. Charley, does your father drink?

CHAR. No. Is lunacy hereditary in your family?

TAL. Never heard of it. I say, foot-ball's a capital game, for the *feet*. But the ball has a somewhat invidious and one-sided sort of place of it, hasn't he? I don't care for any more abuse.

CHAR. Nor I. (*To the fathers*) As we appear by some unfortunate means of which we know nothing to have grievously offended everybody, explanations are, of course, impossible. (*With solemnity and decision*) But as—before such an undertaking as—

TAL. Hear! hear! Such an undertaking as we are about to—in short, to undertake.

CHAR. Quiet and uninterrupted companionship is desirable in order to finally settle our plans regarding emigration. (*Both the fathers start.*)

TAL. Just so. And *you*, having once turned us out, must not feel surprised if we—(*shrugs his shoulders, and hands SIR GEOFFRY his hat.*)

MID. Em—emigration!

SIR G. Are you mad, sir? Do you know the time of the year—winter?

MID. Why, confound it, Charley—I mean, *Charles*—you're not going to leave me—to leave England, I mean? What are you both dreaming of?

TAL. Nothing *now*; we've woke up.

SIR G. And where would you—

CHAR. Queensland, or else, perhaps—

MID. Charley, I can't bear this, you're a driving me desprit. If—if you go you'll—you'll *break my heart!* Dammy, I can't play the Roman father no longer! (*Sinks into a chair, up L.*)

SIR G. (*aside*) He's given in—I knew he would. If he *hadn't I must* have done, and it's best as it is. Ha-hem! We have been—a—*hasty*—perhaps, when we were concealed in those rooms—a—(*breaks down*) Talbot—Talbot—(TALBOT *looks at him—he immediately becomes frigid*) In *my* case much is at stake. You are my *son*—my heir—(*with severity*) I—I *command* you to give up this mad notion. (*He*

is standing in a proud and authoritative attitude—a contrast to MIDDLEWICK, who is sitting crushed and tearful.)

MID. Charley—I—I—implore YOU! (*slight pause on picture, the young men, c.*)

TAL. (*coldly*) I regret my inability to obey you.

CHAR. (*same tone*) Talbot has replied for both.

SIR G. (*almost overcome*) And this—*this* is the result of our much vaunted systems. Even a rod of iron will—
(VIOLET and MARY have entered.)

VIO. (*down, R.*) Will rust, Sir Geoffry.

MARY. (*down, L.*) And the truest steel may fail you when most you may rely on it.

VIO. O Charley! forgive me—we know *all* now.

MARY. And we're *so* ashamed of ourselves! (*The young couples talk eagerly.*)

SIR G. (*looks amazed; to girls*) Why—why aren't you on the Continent?

MARY. Why aren't you at the Cattle Show?

VIO. (*to CHARLEY*) I never imagined you saw me in the street.

MID. Here, what's this? Why ain't you abroad? Yes, abroad. (*To SIR GEOFFRY*) I'll be hanged if *we* ain't.

VIO. Fancy the two old gentlemen hiding themselves so absurdly, and our having such horrible—

MARY. But highly *natural*—

TAL. No, no, *un-natural*—

MARY. Suspicious.

MID. We can't have been, and yet they seem to be. Ha! ha! (*Gives a violent start on seeing CLARISSA'S bonnet.*)

TAL. Upon my life, Charley, that jolly old firework, your father, ought to be *put out*.

MID. What's that, eh?

SIR G. (*seizing it*) Yes! No LADY was ever seen in such a monstrosity as *that*. Combining as it does the concentrated incongruity of Covent Garden Market with the accumulated imbecility of the Burlington Arcade. (*The girls look surprised at the young men, who can't explain.*)

VIO. It is a bonnet.

MARY. And a hideous one.

MID. The question is, whose is it? (*Enter CLARISSA, D. F.*)

CLAR. Mine, if you please—don't crush it. (*Comes down, takes it.*)

GIRLS. Miss Champneys!

TAL. Aunt!

SIR G. (*severe again*) So, Clarissa—madam, you not only come up to town against my express commands—but—but in an article of attire which is simply—

MID. *Loud*—oh! yes, you're a highly sensible woman, but it *is* loud.

CLAR. That's *your* opinion. I paid Mr. Warrington to discover my nephew, and notwithstanding your threats, Geoffry, I preferred to brave your anger rather than share your regret, when you had perhaps found your son—the victim of a severe father's system—either in the streets or gone heaven knows where. My dear nephew—Mr. Middlewick, (*shakes hands*) I've heard how you behaved to him. But you're two scarecrows. I've got a fowl at the kitchen fire, and as it's only enough for two, we'll all go round to luncheon at Sir Geoffry's hotel, whilst *you*—

MID. Polish off the poultry. Brayvo!

SIR G. (*severely*) What, sir?

MID. It's no good, don't look severe, Sir Geoffry. (*Goes to him*) It don't suit you.

SIR G. (*chafing*) But my own sister—a Champneys, cooking a fowl in a lodging-house kitchen, and I'm positively certain *spoiling* it—defying my authority and—

VIO. (*has slipped her arm through his*) Sir Geoffry, dear Sir Geoffry, don't you think we've *all* been a little wrong?

SIR G. (*pleased*) Eh?

VIO. You, especially?

SIR G. (*huffed*) He-hem!

VIO. And that we all ought to beg each other's pardons?

MARY. (*other side*) Yes, dear Sir Geoffry, and promise to forget the past and never do so any more?

VIO. Eh, Sir Geoffry? (*Squeezing his arm.*)

MARY. Eh, dear Sir *Geff.*? (*Same business.*)

SIR G. (*pleased, and unable to deny it*) Ha! ha! Sir *Geff.* indeed! (*looks at each other admiringly*) You're a couple of syrens. I feel you would make me forgive *anything*—except that bonnet.

CHAR. I must own it staggered *me*. I knew it couldn't be Belinda's.

BOTH GIRLS. (*drop SIR GEOFFRY'S arm*) Who's Belinda?

TAL. Ha! ha! A slave.

SIR G. What?

TAL. Slave of the *ring*—comes when you pull the *bell*, you know. (*Enter BELINDA*) One of the best girls in England, and the best nurse in the universe, as *I* well know.

BEL. That fowl's a frizzling itself to regler fiddle-strings. Why, everybody seems to know everybody else.

MID. (*beckons her to him*) Here. Have you—have you got a young man? A sweetheart, you know?

BEL. A young man! He! he! And me two-and-twenty!

MID. Just so. What *is* he? I mean, what's his business? How does he get his living?

BEL. He's a butterman.

MID. *Is he though?* Tell him to call round to-morrow at that address, and I'll buy him the best business in the borough. (BELINDA *goes up dazed*) Sir Geoffry, they're our own again—our boys.

SIR G. No, no; somebody else's. (*Points to the young couples spooning. CLARISSA is explaining to BELINDA.*)

MID. All in good time. (*Laughing*) You and your rod of iron, bless your 'art, it wasn't a bar of soap.

SIR G. (*shaking hands*) Ha! ha! I'm afraid so, and *you*—*you* a father of ancient Rome! Ha! ha! *Greece* is more in *your* line.

VIO. (*to CHARLEY*) Yes, yes, Charley, I know I was blind to my own shortcomings, and was haughty, headstrong, and capricious, whilst *you*, Mary—

MARY. I don't think I've been anything in particular, and if I *have* I'm not going to admit it.

TAL. Quite right, Mary, nothing like being thoroughly satisfied with *yourself*, unless it's being MORE than satisfied with ME.

SIR G. Clarissa, I was foolish just now. I beg your pardon. Talbot, dear boy—(*shakes hands*) Charles—(*shakes hands*) I—I see my error.

MID. Ha! ha!

SIR G. (*stiffly and abruptly at him*) And other people's. (*Aside*) I'm so happy I—but I *mustn't* admit it—a—YET. (*To them*) We haven't understood each other, borne with each other, we haven't shown sufficient of the glorious old principles of "give and take." Sister, boys and girls, old friend (*to MIDDLEWICK*), hot tempers, hasty judgments, extreme crotchets, thick-skinned prejudice, theory and rule run rampant, ignoring the imperfections of poor human nature—these, henceforth, we throw overboard and rise to brighter realms, even as the aspiring aeronaut flings away his heavy ballast and floats serenely through the cloudless sky. (*Melody in orchestra swells as*)

CURTAIN FALLS ON PICTURE.



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