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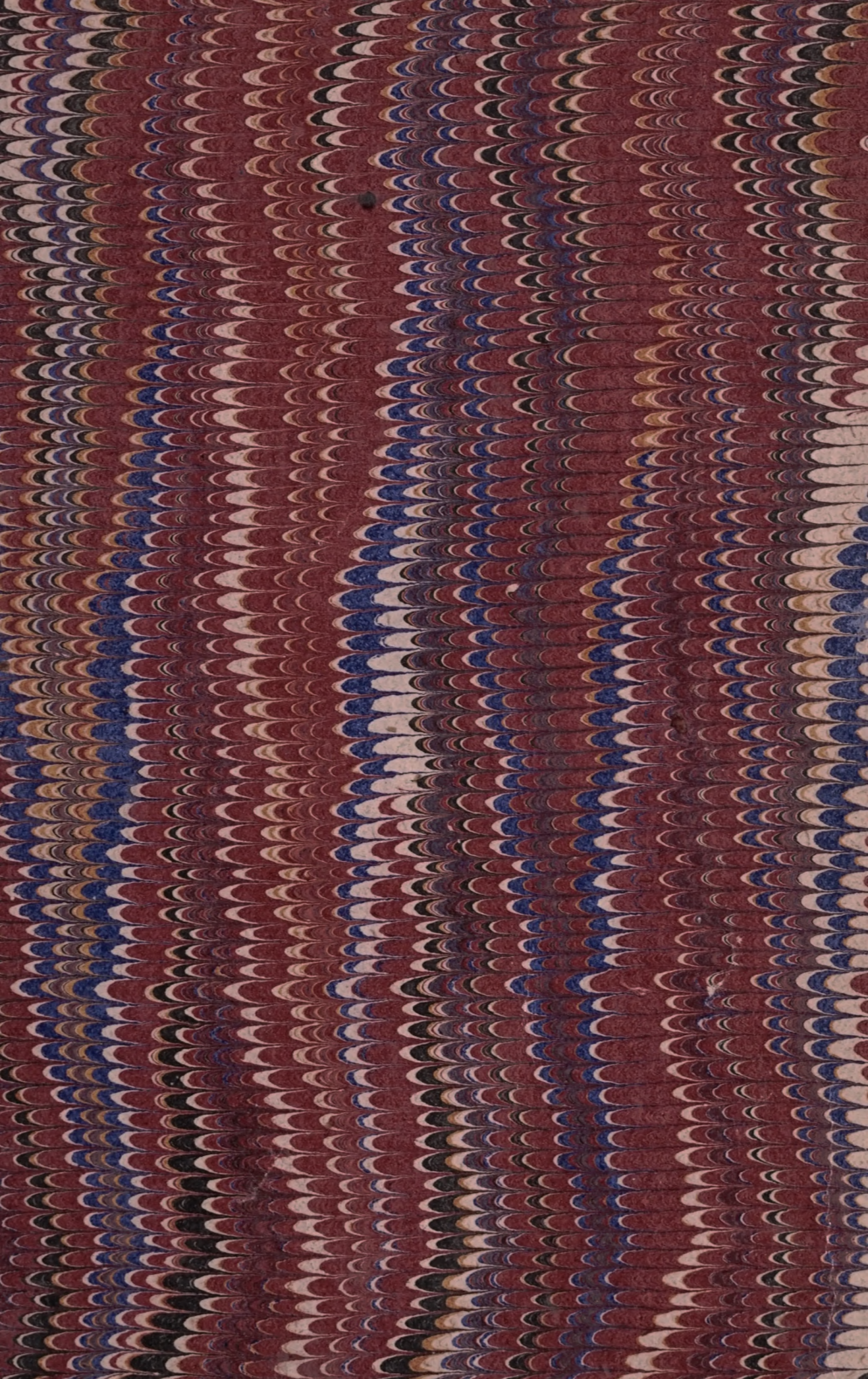
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A LITTLE FOOL.

BY

JOHN STRANGE WINTER.

Handwritten:
H. F. V.
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A LITTLE FOOL.

CHAPTER I.

QUARTERED AT IDLEMINSTER.

With blackest moss the flower-plots
Were thickly crusted one and all;
The rusted nails fell from the knots,
That held the pear to the garden-wall,
The broken sheds looked sad and strange;
Unlifted was the clinking latch;
Weeded and worn the ancient thatch
Upon the lonely moated Grange.

TENNYSON.

THE curiosity of the good people of Idleminster who lived upon the same side of the town as the barracks lay had been aroused by the news that the Priory was being put in repair.

It was an extraordinary thing, so everybody said, to have the Priory occupied at all; for within the memory of living man it had always been empty. Nobody was very sure to whom it belonged—tradition said that its owner was rich and hated the place, had always hated it, and was revenging himself upon it for some grudge he had against it in the past, by leaving it to the rats and the spiders and letting it fall to decay.

Some said that it was haunted, others that murder had

been done within its walls; either of which reports might or might not be true. Any way, certain it is that within the memory of living man its windows had never been cleaned, its doors and shutters painted, or its rooms made habitable. The garden, all that was left of what had once been large and extensive pleasure grounds, now sacrificed to the inroads of the encroaching and enterprising builder and covered with roads and streets of new little villas and terraces, had been for years a tangled mass of weeds and briars; the turf had strayed over the graveled foot-walks until it was hard to tell where any walks had been, and the old summer-house in the sunny corner where the road turned sharply round toward the barracks, was rotten and fast falling to decay, having, indeed, looked for years as if it was only held together by the climbing wreaths of jasmine and clematis which encircled it; while the ivy which would have entirely covered the house had it been trimmed and tended, was by reason of its own weight, torn down by every gust of wind that blew.

Then suddenly all was changed! And one fine Monday morning in May, the neighbors saw with surprise that smoke was issuing from more than one of the long-disused chimneys, the windows were thrown wide open, the doors stood hospitably back on their hinges, and quite a small army of workmen seemed to have taken possession of the place.

Now I must tell you that the Priory was not in the city of Idleminster itself, but was away on the pretty country road which ran past the barracks, which lie, as every one knows, about a couple of miles from the town.

Why it had ever been called "the Priory" nobody knew, but undoubtedly such was its name, though up to the time of which I am writing it might—if one had allowed one's imagination to supply the moat—as well, or really better, have been called "the moated Grange" than anything else. For there was absolutely nothing of a priory about it. In the few places where the ivy had left the walls uncovered, you could see that they were of red brick—the upper story had very ordinary sash-windows, and the rooms on the ground-floor had French casements; there was a wide, old-fashioned door in the middle, and on either side a sitting-room with large windows, that on the right evidently the dining-room, the one on the other side having traces of gilding and handsome decorations still apparent about it. This last room had also a large window at the side, which looked out on a tangled mass of turf and weeds which would by and by be a flower-garden or perhaps a tennis-ground, and it led into a very tiny room or boudoir by a door-way next to the fire-place. Truly not much of the priory about this part of the house.

Nor was it more so elsewhere—the entrance hall was low and wide, the walls paneled to the cornice with wood off which the faded and blistered salmon-colored paint was fast peeling under the hands of a skillful artisan—the stairs were wide and shallow, the hand-rail of the balusters broad and massive, while the window which lighted the first landing and faced the hall was filled with richly stained glass, and had, happily, borne the ravages of time and chance better almost than any other window in the house.

The rooms above were very much like the rooms below—large, pleasant and cheery, though somewhat low in the ceilings. And here, as in the sitting-rooms, men were hard at work peeling off the damp and dingy paper or scraping away the shabby and blistered paint.

“A picturesque old place, my dear,” remarked one or two eagerly inquisitive ladies who, under pretense of finding out if the Priory would suit them to live in or not, had strayed in to see what they could see and pick up any odds and ends of news which might happen to be floating about. “In a dreadful state, *of course*—but decidedly a house with capabilities. H’m—I suppose,” in a different tone, as she addressed herself to a man with a pail of hot water who appeared in the door-way at that moment—“I suppose there is no objection to our looking over the house?”

“Not as I knows on, mum,” returned the man, civilly, “though you’ll find it in a terrible dirty condition, scarce fit for ladies to venture in.”

“Oh, we don’t mind the dirt—thanks,” with a little airy laugh. “I suppose you are going to do the place up thoroughly?”

“From end to end, mum,” replied the man, promptly.

“Ah!—*that* will make a great difference. And—er—do you know what rent is asked for the place?”

But the intelligent workman shook his head. “I haven’t any idea, mum—in fact, I believe the ’ouse is not to let; but Mr. Somers is here, he’ll be able to tell you if you ask him, mum.”

At this moment Mr. Somers came along—a smart young

man, the son of the contractor who was carrying out the work of putting the house into habitable repair.

“Lady wants to know the rent, sir,” said the workman, then dipped his brush into his pail and went on splashing at the walls as if his life’s ransom hung upon his not wasting so much as a single moment.

“Good-morning, ma’am—the house is not to let,” said young Mr. Somers, civilly.

“Oh! really. Ah! I’m sorry—such a pretty old place,” murmured the lady, who would almost as soon have laid her head in her coffin as have laid it under the roof of the Priory—“and is it being done up to live in?”

“It is, ma’am—the owner is coming to occupy the house as soon as we get our part done.”

“Oh! really—you don’t say so. By the bye, who is the owner?”

“A Mrs. Darrell,” returned young Mr. Somers.

“Mrs. Darrell—oh! really— Well, we must not take up any more of your time. Many thanks for letting us look over the house.”

The two ladies made a polite bow to the young man, who took off his hat, perhaps thinking as he did so that as they had given themselves the permission to look over the house, he could not take much credit to himself for his graciousness in the matter.

Then the one who had done all the talking turned back again. “Er—by the bye—you couldn’t tell me, I dare say, where Mrs. Darrell has lived until now?”

“I could not, ma’am—our first instructions came from her solicitors, who said she was abroad—then she came

down to see the place for herself and to choose papers and paint and so on."

"Is she young?" eagerly.

"Not particularly young, ma'am," replied young Mr. Somers in a matter-of-fact tone—"about as old as yourself, I should say. Any way, she'd a grown-up daughter with her—un uncommonly pretty young lady too she was, uncommonly pretty."

"Oh! I see—er—*good-morning*," and away went the little lady after her friend, feeling that young Mr. Somers's civility was all put on and that he had meant neither more nor less than to deliberately insult her—for she was just thirty-four and had a family of small children of whom the eldest was not yet six years old—and to be classed as "not particularly young" and about the same age as a woman with a grown-up daughter was rather more than even her airy graciousness could stand against. "A most insufferable young man, my dear," she remarked to her friend when she joined her at the gate. "That is the worst of Idleminster people—particularly of that class—there's so much of the good-as-you-and-better air about them."

"What did he say?" asked the other.

"Oh! well, it was not so much what he *said* as the way he said it," returned the airy little lady vaguely.

And, after all, the aggravating part of it was that she had to go away without any very definite or accurate information about the lady who was coming to live at the Priory—only that she was a Mrs. Darrell and that she had

been abroad, though whether for a long or short period she had not the least idea.

And if she had only known it was such a simple story, the story of Mrs. Darrell; just the very ordinary one of a beautiful woman married very young and against the advice and wishes of her friends to a handsome, dissolute scoundrel, who had been the most devoted of lovers and adoring of husbands as long as the wife's few thousand pounds lasted; who had been the fondest of husbands and fathers even then, yet who let his wife go almost roofless and his children quite shoeless while he gambled away every farthing of their small income; who finally took to hard drinking as the only panacea by which to drown his conscience, and finally died the miserable death of a drunkard, leaving the beautiful heart-broken wife at thirty years old to bring up their three little children as best she could on the wretched pittance which remained of their joint fortunes!

But Mrs. Darrell did it—*how*, neither she nor any one else ever quite knew—by such a struggle with poverty and fate as only such women as she ever know the meaning of; by living in France and Italy that every penny might be put to the best use and her children have the benefit of that education which comes freely to those who live in a foreign country—the benefit of learning perfectly other tongues besides their own.

There were times when she gave lessons in English or did sewing for the shops of the towns in which they were living, and later, when by a mighty effort she moved to Milan, she took an old palazzo and set up a home for En-

glish girls who wished to study under the great masters of singing there—that perhaps paid her the best of all, for the end was fairly good and the means thereto thoroughly to her taste.

And then, when ten years of widowhood and strife had come and gone, when her eldest girl was eighteen and beginning to fancy she could help her mother better by going out into the world than by taking her share of the daily duties of the old palazzo, there came a great change, for George Darrell's uncle and godfather died, leaving to his graceless nephew's widow—whom, by the bye, he had never seen or encouraged in any way—the old Priory near Idleminster, a legacy of three hundred pounds to put it into thorough repair, and a further sum, sufficient to bring in four hundred a year, securely invested in the Funds.

Even in the first flush of her joy and delight Mrs. Darrell never hesitated about going at once to settle down in the house at Idleminster. She cared but little what size it was, knowing or at least believing that the kind old man who had set her free from care for the rest of her life, would not have left the place to her if it had been too large for the income he had left with it—and to her the joy of having a home of her very own, near a good county town where her children would be able to take their natural position, was simply inexpressible; and as soon as they could set off to England they did so, leaving for a year or so the youngest of the three girls behind them.

Then Mrs. Darrell and Violet went down to see their new house—and Violet made her first impression in Idle-

minster on the heart of young Mr. Somers. He called her "uncommon pretty," and that she truly was!

"Her steps royal—queen-like—and her face
As beautiful as a saint's in Paradise."

CHAPTER II.

VIOLET DARRELL'S SWEETHEART.

You could not light upon a sweeter thing,
A body slight and round, and like a pear
In growing, modest eyes, a hand, a foot
Lessening in perfect cadence, and a skin
As clean and white as privet when it flowers.

TENNYSON.

I HAVE not said that the Priory was just at the entrance of the village of Ambledith, but such was the fact. The barracks were in the parish of Ambledith, and were in truth properly known as "Ambledith Barracks, near Idleminster," although the regiments occupying them always spoke of being quartered at Idleminster and were entered in the Army List in that way.

But Ambleditch rather looked down upon Idleminster, much in the same way as Kensington Gore looks down upon the dingy little streets which run north and south from the Strand; they may be convenient for theaters and for the law-courts and for business purposes generally—but are simply not to be compared to Queen's Gate and the Gore itself for a place of living! So it was with the village of Ambledith! The official bungalow of the officer commanding the district was there, not many hundred

yards away from the Priory, in fact; it boasted a squire, who was one of the horsiest men in all the horsey county of Idleshire, and whose wife prided herself on wearing no heels to her shoes and the thickest soles—winter and summer alike—of any lady of her station for ten miles around.

And besides these attractions, there were seven or eight good houses belonging for the most part to ladies who liked to float about the different watering-places and so get a good deal of change of air and scene and at the same time turn an honest penny by letting their houses to the married officers quartered at Idleminster, or to such lovers of *le sport* as desired to hunt a season with the Idleshire Hounds.

So the little village took great pride to itself for being quite the head-quarters of the military society of the neighborhood, and always contrived somehow or other to make Idleminster people, and those who lived in the other outlying parts, feel that by not living in Ambleditch they occupied, socially and physically, a distinctly inferior position to those who did.

There was a good deal of gossip and not a little peeping and prying when the new occupants of the Priory came and took possession of the house, over which, during the few days when the workmen were putting the finishing touches to the decorations, every lady in the village had by hook or by crook contrived to look. Nobody seemed to know anything of Mrs. Darrell's belongings or antecedents except that, at one time or other, she had lived or been abroad—nobody seemed to know her class or station, and, as more than one old lady with an inordinate idea of her

own position in society and of her importance in the world of Ambleditch, protested—"It really is very awkward—one does not know whether to call on her or not; for, although the fact that it is her own house is in itself a recommendation, yet there are persons living in their own houses whom, of course, it would be simply impossible to know."

"I saw the furniture going in yesterday," said another, "and you know, dear Mrs. Fox, my gate being *just* opposite to the Priory, I can not sit at my window without seeing; and it all seemed very simple and tasteful. Quite *new* though," with a glance round her own well-polished Chippendale tables and faded damask curtains, as if the new mistress of the Priory would have to satisfactorily prove her worth before she could be placed on the same level as one whose household goods had unmistakably belonged to her grandmother. She did not add, as she gave that deprecating glance across the road and uttered her small apology for not being able to help seeing something of her neighbor's doings, that, as a matter of fact, it was not from the window of her sitting-room at all that she had marked the quality and newness of the furniture, but from that of her bedroom above, and that she had assisted her natural vision with a good opera-glass; but then, you know, in this world it is better to say too little than too much, and the wisdom of that rule was not unknown even in the little village of Ambleditch, or to the little old ladies who lived therein as their fathers and mothers had lived before them, ay, and, in some cases, even their fore-elders from generation to generation.

Meantime Mrs. Darrell and her two elder daughters had taken up their quarters in the town and were very busy looking after the ordering and arranging of their new house. They gave but little thought to their new neighbors, their lives having been such as had got them into the habit of leaving their neighbors out of their calculations altogether.

And, indeed, all their energies were given to making every penny of the three hundred pounds, which George Darrell's godfather had left for the purpose of doing up the Priory, do the work of at least a shilling—not an easy task or one which leaves much time for making discoveries about neighbors, although Mrs. Darrell, perhaps, was as clever at that kind of work as most people. Still it was not easy, for she not only wanted to put the Priory into decent repair out of that sum but in a great measure to furnish it as well.

“You see,” she said to Violet, when they were discussing the size of the rooms and the expediency of having the floors covered with carpet or polished in the style to which they had been so long accustomed, “we have nothing to start with. It isn't as if we had a house full of good old furniture that only needed touching up here and there to look perfect. We have to start from the very beginning, and though it is not a large house, it will swallow up a good deal of furniture.”

“That is so—but, mother dear, I should decidedly go for polished floors—we all understand them and Virginie is used to doing them. And if they are not common in England, so much the better for us.”

“And what jolly dances we can have,” chimed in Georgie, the second girl. “And besides, lovey, if you don’t go wasting a lot of money on nasty, dusty, extravagant, expensive carpets, we shall be able to have some more frocks and such things.”

“Trust Georgie to think of her looks,” Violet laughed.

“I don’t think so much of my looks,” said Georgie, with the utmost gravity, “as of their effect upon other people. And I saw some men go past the gate just now—oh!” with a rapturous clasping of her little dimpled hands, “they were real lovely—lovely,” and she gave a great sigh, and fixed her blue eyes upon the little space of the road just then visible to them, as if all the chances of her future happiness were lying there.

“What sort of men?” asked Violet, with but little attention, for she was occupied in holding the end of a measure that Mrs. Darrell might take the exact size of the room.

“Soldiers—officers,” returned Georgie.

“Ah! very likely. I believe we are rather near the barracks—we passed them on the way, I noticed. Well, mother, what do you think about carpet or polish?”

“I think we had better say polish,” Mrs. Darrell replied. “As you say, Violet, we must not forget that Virginie understands it.”

This point settled, their work was soon done; for when there is not much money to spend the plan of spending it is soon decided upon. They fixed on the tone of color for the curtains—on simple brass rods for the cornices, on such and such a suite of furniture being an absolute neces-

sity, and on a certain amount of wicker-work which would serve its turn and look both cozy and elegant until they could afford to replace it by more substantial and lasting articles. And then, with a last look of proud possession round the cheerful spick and span house which was henceforth to be their very own, their *home*, they locked the doors and set out to walk back to their lodgings in Idleminster.

And then the very oddest thing in the whole world happened; for just as Mrs. Darrell passed through the gate on to the foot-path a lady with two gentlemen coming from the direction of the village stopped short with an exclamation of extreme surprise. "Why, Gertie," she cried, "is it possible it can be you?"

"Mary Mackenzie," cried Mrs. Darrell, in astonished tones.

"No, not Mary Mackenzie now. I've been Mary Seymour nearly eighteen years now. And this is my husband; Jim—this is Mrs. Darrell—Gertrude Conway, of whom you've heard me speak so often," then as the gentleman whom she called Jim took off his hat, added, "And are you coming to live here, Gertie, and are these," with a gesture of surprise at the height of one of the young ladies—"your girls?"

"Yes, these are my two eldest girls, Violet and Georgie. Madge, the youngest, we have left at school in Milan for a year or so. We have lived abroad entirely since my husband died ten years ago, but now we have come home for good. Indeed, we have just had this house left to us and are going to take possession in a few days."

“I am delighted to hear it,” exclaimed Mrs. Seymour, heartily, “for we are living only a few doors away, and really, Gertie, we shall be able to fancy ourselves girls together again, if these big children of ours do not quite do away with the illusion. You are going to walk into town—so are we. We will go together, but first let me make Mr. Hills of our regiment known to you.” And almost before the young man who accompanied them could lift his hat, Mrs. Seymour tucked her hand within the arm of her girlhood’s friend and walked off with her. With the instinct of a nature which even at seventeen was that of a born and finished coquette, Georgie Darrell turned to pair off with the younger of the two officers, but Hills never even cast so much as a glance at her. His keen eyes—and they were keen—were fixed on Violet, and Georgie, much to her disgust, had to content herself with the husband of her mother’s old friend—Colonel Seymour.

CHAPTER III.

GEORGIE DARRELL’S LITTLE FINGER.

There are words which sever hearts more than sharp swords; there are words, the point of which sting the heart through the course of a whole life.

MISS BREMER.

IN a remarkably short time the Darrells, mother and daughters, settled down into that way of life into which their lives had been cast. They found the friendship of Mrs. Seymour of inestimable benefit to them. Mrs. Seymour, as the wife of the officer commanding a crack

cavalry regiment—and the Royal Horse was undoubtedly that—had a very good position apart from herself or her family. Then she was personally a very popular woman, popular with the officers and with the wives of such as happened to be married—popular alike with county and towns-people, and therefore she was really of more use to the Darrells as a means of introduction than a hundred letters written for that purpose could have been, and before many weeks had slipped by the Darrell girls found themselves in the midst of what to them was simply a whirl of gayety.

To many girls of their age, life in the old city and its neighborhood was flat, stale, and unprofitable, neither more nor less than as dull as ditch water—but to Violet and Georgie it was all fresh and fair. In all their lives before they had really never known the meaning of the term “Society,” and the bright summer days seemed to pass in an endless round of pleasure.

Their ways of accepting the new state of affairs were very different. Nothing seemed to stir the quietude of the elder girl’s placid nature. She accepted new ideas, new habits, new customs with the air of having been used to them all her life. She was as quiet, as serene, as stately as she had been in the old palazzo at Milan when the great object of her existence seemed to be to become her mother’s right-hand and to set the best of examples to the generally rather boisterous English girls who had left home and friends to carve out a way to fame by the ladder which is perhaps of all ways to fame the most difficult to climb.

And like her mother she was lovely, infinitely more

beautiful than either of her sisters would ever be—whether Madge, who was a tall, awkward brown-faced slip of a girl, with little to recommend her in the way of looks except a wealth of shining nut-brown hair and a pair of brown eyes that were almost uncanny, they were so big and so changeful in expression, or Georgie, who had taken after neither father nor mother, but was the living image of a dead and gone sister of Mrs. Darrell's, who had lived and wed and died twenty years before.

Everybody agreed that Georgie Darrell was one of the prettiest little witches in all the wide world, and yet when you came to pick the little body to pieces you found that she was not so very pretty after all. She had a fine and lovely skin, all roses and lilies like a little child, it is true; and, as every one knows, a beautiful skin is like a cloak, it covers a multitude of faults; hers certainly did. There was one deep and very pretty dimple on the left side of her mouth, and it was perhaps that and the pearly teeth within that hid how completely unlovable the mouth itself really was. And she had a way of opening her eyes very widely when she was spoken to—of making great round O's of them like a baby does; and she had a way too of wrinkling her little pert nose with an air of fastidious disgust which made beholders—particularly the men—want to look at her again; and then she had another little way of thrusting her little dimpled taper fingers into the floating masses of her feathery golden hair with a little distracted air of perplexity—and here let me say that I use the word “floating” advisedly, although Georgie did not wear her hair hanging down her back! On the contrary,

it was piled high on the top of her little head and held in place by a big silver dagger, and apparently nothing else, for every now and again the dagger would drop out and fall to the floor with a crash, and all the feathery golden hair would come tumbling down about the little fair face and give a fine opportunity for all the little airs and graces which constituted Georgie's battery of charms.

For that was just it! Given Violet's calm serenity of manner Georgie would have been nothing—her looks would have been pretty and nothing else; as it was, she passed for a beauty, and in reality her beauty was all trickway—airs and graces! It was the beauty of a kitten who might or might not, with the main chances against it, turn out an even tolerably handsome cat.

And she was a rapacious little person too; rapacious in the way of such small attentions as fall to the share of the girls of her class of life—greedy of admiration, of the little offerings of flowers and books and such odds and ends as found their way to the Priory; and most greedy of all of the personal attention of the men of their acquaintance.

For instance, before they had been settled at the Priory for three months, she had gathered quite a host of admirers about her. She had her pet partners for whom she saved waltzes, those to whom she promised her extras, those with whom she went in to the first or second supper, and those with whom she sat out in shady corners or on convenient stairs. She knew to a nicety at what hour the troops would ride past the house in the morning to watering order, and exactly what field-days and inspections were going on. She knew and could tell you accurately each morning who

was on duty as orderly officer for the day, and also could post you pretty accurately in the contents of the various regimental order-books. She showed a fine impartiality toward rank and standing in the service, and would as soon dawdle away a blissful hour of coquetry under the jasmine-wreathed bower in the garden with a sub of six weeks' standing and his pay as she would have done with the senior captain of the same regiment with a lovely place of his own and ten thousand a year.

"When *I* marry," she remarked, one day in her most sapiently childish way to her sister, "I intend to marry *money!* There's nothing on earth like money."

"And Mr. Ponsonby has such lots of it," returned Violet with a laugh.

"No, poor darling—just a hundred and fifty a year besides his pay," cried Georgie, pityingly. "As if the poor boy could keep out of debt on that!"

"Then you don't mean to marry Mr. Ponsonby, it is evident," said the elder girl.

"Marry Cyril Ponsonby," cried Georgie, opening her eyes and her mouth too a great deal more than was good for her looks. "Why, you must be mad, Vi, to suggest or think of such a thing."

"Perhaps I am; but isn't it rather a pity to see so much of him? He is very young, and I fancy he admires you very much, and—won't it be very painful for him when you find and take your 'money'?"

"Really, Violet, I'm surprised at you," cried Georgie, with a delightful assumption of dignity and reproachfulness. "As if I should run the risk of hurting poor Cyril's

feelings in any way. Of course, he knows perfectly well that I am just as poor as a rat—as poor as he is, dear boy—and that any idea beyond the present is altogether out of the question for us. But I must say it would be hard if I were to shun him and treat him like a leper, simply because he doesn't happen to have any money. Why, it would be as hard as if he treated me in the same way for the same reason."

"It might be *hard*—but, at the same time, I can't help thinking it would be wiser on both sides," said Violet, with a sigh.

However, Georgie could not, or would not, or, at least, did not see it, and still went on dealing out her small favors to Mr. Cyril Ponsonby and a good many others like him, not omitting all the same to cast her pretty wide-open blue eyes around in search of the "money" which was to lift her above the restricting poverty of her present life. But, somehow, the men with money did not seem to see sharing her favors with the insignificant youngsters who were but little good to any one, and although for a time Georgie attracted them all, the attractiveness never lasted. There were handsome men and eligible in their set who were immensely taken with the little wrinkle of the nose, the sudden opening of the blue eyes, the down-falling of the feathery golden hair; yet when they saw the youngsters of their regiments come in for precisely the same course, the attractiveness of the little maneuvers seemed to vanish and become stale and unprofitable to them.

But there was one man of their acquaintance on whom Georgie Darrell could make no impression whatever, ap-

parently not even a bad one. That was one John Hills, senior subaltern of the Royal Horse.

The reason was obvious—apparent to every one who thought about the matter at all. And it was that Hills had already given away his heart to Mrs. Darrell's elder daughter Violet.

“It will be such a good thing for her, Gertie,” exclaimed the colonel's wife one day to her old friend. “I can and do congratulate you from the very bottom of my heart. You, see we have known him for years, and he has always been just the same, so straightforward and honest, not one who ran much after girls, though they always seemed willing enough to make up for that by running after him. But I never saw him really taken before this, never. And it is such a good thing for Violet.”

“Yes, it would be a good thing, I suppose,” murmured the mother, her thoughts flying sadly back to the gallant lover who had wooed and won her, who had been the gay and gallant lover to the end, although he had never had the strength of purpose to keep away from the accursed green tables for her sake and the sake of the little children for whom he professed such fondness.

“You suppose! My dear girl, the man has four thousand a year and other expectations,” cried the colonel's wife, whose vein of sound and practical common sense was perhaps stronger than her love of romance, and who had never seen any reason to love her colonel less because he was amply blessed with the good things of this world, or felt the least inclination to prefer any other man to him because he might be a few inches taller or because he

possessed the attraction of being, so far as she was concerned, forbidden fruit.

And then the Royal Horse got their orders for India, and the time seemed to have come for Hills to speak out and secure his love, if he meant to speak at all.

The summer had slipped away, the autumn had come and gone, and winter was in the midst of its frosty reign. It was a real old-fashioned winter, such as our fathers and mothers talk about and the Christmas cards glory in, and when the final orders for the Royal Horse reached the regiment, the officers, like every one else in the neighborhood, were in the full swing and enjoyment of skating. For a wonder Hills had not been on the ice that day, but he went up to the Priory to find the ladies just returned, and entertaining four or five young subalterns to afternoon tea; and a word alone with Violet he could not get.

“Do you skate to-morrow?” he asked, “or rather, will you wait here for me—*alone*? I want to see you—we’ve got our orders for India, and I—I—well, you know what I want to say, don’t you?”

And Violet, turning scarlet and then white, said “Yes.”

CHAPTER IV.

HE COMETH NOT.

“Exceeding wise, fair-spoken, and persuading.”

King Henry VIII. Act 4, Sc. 2

WHEN the morrow came, there was not the very least sign of the frost giving way. The little snow that was left

on the road-sides and on the garden path-ways was as hard as iron and as unyielding as it had been the day before. The air was keen and cold, the wind fresh and cutting, the sky dull and leaden.

At the Priory they kept the fires blazing cheerily, and shivered in spite of them; for the Darrells, having been used so long to southern winters, felt the sharp frost terribly, although they *said* that it was lovely and that they simply gloried in a real old-fashioned English winter; and of course who protested the most about her delight therein was Georgie, the one who invariably contrived to get the chair nearest to the fire and the one seat in a room which was most completely out of the draughts.

She came into the drawing-room about two o'clock that afternoon, rubbing her chilly little white hands together, her teeth chattering and her shoulders shrugged up almost to her ears. "How ridiculously warm and comfortable you look," she said to Violet, who was deep in a novel of Miss Broughton's—"but isn't it about time we were going off to the Round Pond?"

Violet's pretty pink cheeks deepened in tint, and she replied, with an assumption of carelessness really admirable in its way, that she did not feel inclined to skate that day, Georgie could go without her.

"*Not skate!*" Georgie cried, as if the other was voluntarily giving up paradise without any adequate or apparent reason. "Oh! Vi—but how absurd! Aren't you well?"

"Oh, yes; but I don't feel inclined," returned Violet, turning yet redder; "I am very cozy where I am, and you

can go just as well without me, Georgie—and I've got letters to write—and—I'm not going to skate."

Georgie took but one look at her sister and then sunk down in a heap on the rug and spread her little hands out to the warmth of the blazing fire. "Do you know what mother is going to do to-day?" she asked.

"Yes—she is going to the Lyttletons with Mrs. Seymour," Violet replied.

"Well, then, I don't think I shall skate either," she said, deliberately, keeping her attention well fixed on the tips of her outspread fingers.

"There is no reason why you should stop at home for me," exclaimed Violet, hastily.

"No? Well, I'll go into town then and see about my blue frock. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"I want some more gold beads from Mrs. Jenkins's," replied the elder girl, in great relief at her sister's answer.

But it was some time before little Miss Georgie got off—so long she sat sunning herself in the rays of the fire-light that Violet began to listen with dread to every footfall on the ice-bound path without, knowing well that if Mr. Hills made his appearance before Georgie was safely out of the house, that the walk into Idleminster would be abandoned.

"It will be too dark to go if you are not off soon, Georgie," she said at last by way of warning.

("Wants me out of the road," said Georgie, to herself.)

"Yes, I must be off," she replied aloud.

But even then she dawdled and dawdled, and finally it was just on the point of half past three when she came into the drawing-room again ready to start.

A pretty and bewitching little figure she was too, in her trim gown of sailor-blue serge, with a smart little jacket of the same color edged with Astrakhan fur, and on the feathery luxuriance of her golden hair a rakish little cap of the same fur set rakishly a little on one side.

“Shall I do?” she inquired, artlessly turning herself slowly round that her sister might get a fair view of her.

She had asked the same question every time that she had worn the gown and the coat and cap, and Violet, in her impatience to have her out of the way, uttered an exclamation of vexation and disgust.

“What a vain little thing you are, Georgie,” she cried. “It is nearly dark now and will be quite dark by the time you get into Idleminster. Do go, if you are going, without wasting any more time. My beads? Oh! yes, half a dozen hanks of them—here is half a crown,” and then, at last, Georgie really made a start and got off.

When she had heard the door close behind her and had seen her go down the path and out at the gate and set off briskly, with her little fair head held well in air and her two little hands thrust jauntily into the pockets of her fur-trimmed jacket, Violet Darrell breathed freely once more. It was already rather more than half past three—the winter day was fast drawing in to dusk and darkness—she was free for at least two hours, and *he* might come now at any moment.

For a minute or two she hesitated whether she should ring for Virginie and tell her that she was not at home to any one but Mr. Hills—then an unaccountable and inde-

scribable shyness came over her and she shrunk from giving such an unusual order. No—she would wait till he came, and then she would ask Virginie to bring the tea and the muffins and she would just whisper—“I’m not at home to any one else this afternoon, Virginie.” Yes, backed up by his presence she could do that.

The Darrells had always been used to help themselves, and she brought out a smart little broom and swept up the hearth as naturally as if there were no such person as Virginie in the house; and then she went round the pretty dainty room and touched it up here and there, moving a table an inch or twisting a big palm into a better position, and such other little tender offices as showed her to the very best advantage.

“I will just run up and wash my hands,” she said, when at length her pilgrimage brought her to a stand-still in front of a mirror. “He will be here in a minute or so now.”

There were other little touches to be done at her toilet before she was satisfied with herself or felt ready and fit for her sweetheart’s coming—her soft fair hair needed some alterations and her pretty blue gown, like Georgie’s, looked all the prettier and smarter for being brushed wherever she could reach it. And then she shook out a fine and flimsy little handkerchief with a gay-colored border which made it almost as bright as a posy of flowers, and thrust it between the buttons of her gown—and then she took out from a little box upon her dressing-table one of the few treasures she possessed in the way of jewelry or rather of ornament, an old collar of beaten silver-work,

massive and strong, which fitted the high braided collar of her gown as if it had been made for the purpose.

And then she went down-stairs and waited for his coming, wondering a little that he had not come already. It was then past four, and a dark afternoon even for the time of the year. "He will be here soon now," she told herself—"he has been kept in barracks later than usual."

She sat down before the fire, but she could not rest there. "I may as well put the shutters in and light the lamps," she said aloud, and set herself at once to do it, with a comfortable feeling that she was doing it for him.

She drew the curtains and lighted the lamps, arranged the pretty crimson shades which hung over them and gave the room an uncertain rosy light very charming to the complexion but terribly trying to the eyes and wonderfully conducive to laziness of every kind.

There were candles too set here and there, but they were shrouded in crimson also, or shaded by gaudy butterflies which looked like gigantic moths trying to poke themselves into a flame not a twentieth part as big as themselves—and Violet lighted them all, not really because they were wanted, but more because the task gave her something to do.

But the fingers were soon idle again, for with the best intentions in the world to kill time it is not a long business to light six or eight candles, even when each one is shaded and the shade requires a nice adjustment. And still he did not come! The little clock above the cheerful fire rang out a tiny peal or at least part of one—half past four; and Violet tapped her pretty, slender fingers impa-

tiently on the arm of her chair and finally took up her novel again, as if protesting that because he was wasting time she need not do so any longer.

Yet, somehow, absorbed as she had been in that very book all the morning, she could not interest herself in it in the very least now. Instead of keeping herself interested in the woes of a fascinating heroine, her ears were on the stretch for the click of the garden gate and the sound of a quick soldierly footstep on the hard-frozen gravel path; so with a sigh she put the book down and gave herself up once more to idleness. And still he did not come! The little chime of the clock rang out the hour of five, and Virginie came to see if she would have tea.

“Not just yet, Virginie,” she answered, “we will wait a little till—till madame comes home. I dare say she will not be long now.”

So Virginie went back to her kitchen and the company of the little maid who was her underling, to wait for madame, and Violet stayed where she was to wait—well, not exactly for madame, but that is a detail and did not, of course, concern Virginie especially.

“How late he is,” she thought, impatiently—and then all at once she heard a firm quick step upon the path without—it stopped—there was the click of the gate—the step upon the garden-walk, and the sound of the bell pealing through the house.

It was but an instant ere Virginie went quickly—all Virginie’s movements were quick—along the passage, and the door was open, but it was long enough for Violet Dar-

rell to grow sick and faint and for a violent trembling to seize her in every limb. Then the door opened to admit Virginie's dark French face in its neat white cap—"Mr. Ponsonby," she said.

How she rose and greeted him, bade Virginie bring tea, and made a gracious gesture toward a chair, Violet Darrell never knew. Looking back, long afterward, she believed that she did these things—and she certainly kept her wits about her to notice that her visitor gave a keen look round the room, and that his face fell on perceiving that she was its only occupant.

"You are all alone?" he said, rather blankly.

In spite of her disappointment she could have laughed aloud at his expression of disgust.

"Yes, I am quite alone. My mother is out with Mrs. Seymour, and Georgie is in Idleminster somewhere."

"She has not gone to skate?" eagerly.

"Not to-day—" and then before she could say another word a carriage drew up at the gate, and a moment later her mother and Mrs. Seymour entered the room, bringing with them a gust of sharp fresh air and laughter.

"Little minx," cried the colonel's wife, gayly. "She pretended not to see us—and how devoted he looked."

"Who was that?" asked Violet, never noticing that her mother was unmistakably trying to make her friend stop her revelations.

"Why, little Georgie and Mr. Hills—really, the combination was too funny," Mrs. Seymour answered. "He never saw us, but she did, and pretended she didn't—they were looking at the photographs in Giles's window."

So *that* was why he had not come; and she had waited—in vain!

CHAPTER V.

THE YOUNGEST MISS DARRELL.

“ When Fortune in her shift and change of mood,
Spurns down her late beloved, all his dependents,
Which labor'd after him to the mountain's top
Even on their knees and hands, let him slip down,
Not one accompanying his declining foot.”

Timon of Athens. Act 1, Sc. 1.

NEARLY three years had gone by and the Darrells were still at the Priory; their household had not been decreased—on the contrary, indeed, for Madge had been at home from her school in Milan for nearly six months, and neither Violet nor Georgie were yet married.

It can not be said that time had dealt altogether so smoothly with them as their future prospects had seemed to promise when they took possession of the house. Four hundred a year, with the addition of the slender income on which Mrs. Darrell had managed somehow to bring up her daughters, if not in comfort at least in health and respectability, had seemed to them like a large fortune; but in reality that sum is but a small income, even when it is further supplemented by having no house-rent to pay.

As might have been expected, the legacy of three hundred pounds had not proved sufficient to cover the cost of putting the exceedingly dilapidated house into repair and also that of furnishing it, although the outlay on the house

itself had been, so far as the decorations went, kept as low as possible by means of choosing the simplest of papers and the plainest of paint. Still, even by denying themselves all the little luxuries of art papers and dadoes, friezes and dado-rails, and the seductive delights of cozy corners and tall Japanese screens, by doing without old china—even such as could be got on the “picked-up” principle—and by furnishing with a great deal of cretonne and Liberty muslin frilling to a very little substantial oak and rose-wood, when the various bills for making their home habitable came in Mrs. Darrell found that, with all her efforts, the amount had swelled up to something over four hundred pounds instead of being something just under three.

And that hundred and odd pounds had hung like a leaden weight about the dear lady's neck ever since; truly it was not a rolling stone, and somehow or other it gathered moss at a prodigious rate.

“I thought, when we turned our backs on Milan, that I should never know another care in the world,” she sighed one dismal November day to Violet, who was busy with the body of an evening gown, which she was trimming with fresh gauze.

“What is it now, darling?” Violet asked, turning her beautiful placid eyes, so like what her mother's had been, from the work on her knee to an ugly-looking blue paper in Mrs. Darrell's hand.

“Income tax,” Mrs. Darrell answered. “And somehow I always feel the income tax the hardest to pay of anything. It seems such a shame that when we want the

money for a dozen other things, that it should have to go for that. It's like throwing it into the street—it is really.”

“Yes, it does seem too bad,” Violet assented. “Ah! here is Georgie.”

Miss Georgie came in with a rush. “What a miserable fire you two always keep,” she began—then caught up the poker and began to stir the dull burning coals vigorously.

“Georgie, put the poker down; I can not have it!” Mrs. Darrell cried. “The coals are nearly out now, Virginie tells me; and how we are to go on getting more and more at the present rate I don't know.”

Georgie dropped the poker and settled herself down upon the hearth-rug in her favorite attitude, spreading out her little white and useless hands to the blaze, such as it was.

“Does it ever occur to either of you,” she asked, “that now we have nearly five hundred a year—quite five hundred a year, if you take the rent into consideration—that we are really a great deal poorer than we were in Milan?”

“Our ideas have grown since then,” returned Violet.

“Yes; and of course Madge has grown into a monster since then,” remarked Georgie, calmly. “When she was a gawky slip of a girl with frocks above her ankles, she could wear up our things; it must make a great difference to you, mother, to have to dress her as well as us.”

There was a distinct tone of resentment in the girl's voice against her younger sister for having had the audacity to leave her gawky girlhood behind her and grow

up into a fine young woman. Violet made haste to do instant battle for the absent one.

“As Madge is not out yet, her clothes don't cost much—and really, Georgie, my dear, now that you have broached the subject, don't you think it would be a very simple way of economizing if you had our gowns cut down for you? You are so very small, you know, that you could have fresh seams everywhere.”

“*I!*” gasped Georgie—“I wear somebody's—*anybody's*—*Madge's* old clothes? Why, Vi, my dear, you must be dreaming or out of your mind to suggest such a thing.”

“Not at all,” returned Violet, coolly—“Madge had a good long spell at wearing yours—so why shouldn't you turn and turn about? It would only be fair. And, after all—what is there so very wonderful about you that you should invariably have the best of everything?”

“I don't have the best of everything,” retorted Georgie—“but I do get the best time when I go out, because I've got a contented mind, which is more than any of you have. I had a lovely time last night—just lovely.”

“How many times did you go in to supper?” inquired Violet, holding the bodice a little away the better to get an idea of certain folds of the pretty sheeny gauze with which she was bedecking it.

“Oh! only three.”

“Only three— Ah! here is Madge. Madge, do you know if Virginie is going to bring tea?”

“I heard the tea-spoons rattling just now,” Madge answered. “Why, mother dearie, what's the matter?”

“Income tax,” returned Mrs. Darrell, wearily. “But where have you been, child? You are blue with the cold.”

“In my room, dear.”

“Horridly extravagant I call it using another room and burning more candles,” said Georgie, possessing herself of the poker again and patting the fire here and there so as to coax a few extra rays out of its dull heart.

Madge laughed outright. “It’s what you’ll never do, Georgie, my dear,” she said, with some sarcasm. “Your *métier* is rather to sit in the highest place and take care you keep the fire from every one else and every one else from the fire—*that’s* your line, isn’t it?”

“A very sensible line, too,” said Georgie, carelessly, “much more sensible than going about fancying one’s too good for this world altogether, and daubing one’s fingers with ink to show that one is literary—and wasting good pens and ink and paper.”

Madge unceremoniously pushed her small sister to one side and plumped down on the hearth-rug beside her. “Have you been to Idleminster this afternoon, Georgie?” she inquired, mildly.

“Yes,” said Georgie, rather curtly.

“It isn’t a very promising sort of day, is it?” Madge went on, in dulcet tones. “Did you see many people you knew?”

“No—not many,” Georgie answered.

“I saw Flora West go past just after lunch,” Madge persisted.

“I saw her,” said Georgie, unwillingly.

“Did you walk home with her?”

“No.”

“Then who was she with?”

“She didn’t see me at all,” replied Georgie, evading the question after a way peculiarly her own.

“Did you see Teddy St. Oswald?” Madge went on, after a moment’s pause.

“No—he’s on duty to-day.”

“Or Geoff Hastings?”

“No—” with a doleful shake of the head which made all the feathery golden hair glitter in the fire-light.

“Or Joey Lancaster?”

“Yes; I did see him,” with a frown.

“Ah!—well, that would be some consolation to you for your walk.”

“He didn’t see me,” admitted Georgie, in a very small voice.

• “Then he was with Flora West!” Madge rapped out sharply. “And so you come home as cross as two sticks, you little transparent humbug, and find fault with everybody about you. Upon my word, I think you ought to be shaken,” and forthwith Madge gave the little beauty such a vigorous nudge with her strong young elbow that a complete shipwreck was the immediate result, for Georgie, being taken unawares and sitting with her hands clasped about her knees, was sprawling on the floor the next moment.

Madge jumped up laughing immoderately.

“Here is Virginie—how I do want my tea,” she cried, in her fresh young hearty voice. “I am simply famishing.”

“Leave a little for somebody else,” put in Georgie, tartly, as she gathered herself together and settled all her trimmings and ornaments to her liking. “And don’t knock me down again like that, if you please, Madge. I don’t like it.”

“You should have held your ground better, my child,” Madge laughed. “By the bye, apropos of dear Joey, did you hear that lovely story about him the other day?”

“No. What story?” forgetting her resentment in her eagerness to hear what Madge might have to tell. “About me?”

“You? No, not exactly. It was Major Gooch’s little boy who went with his mother to the barrack children’s Christmas-tree last year. Major Gooch had a bad cold and Tom went into his bedroom full of all he had seen and done, particularly of Joey Lancaster, whom Tom did not recognize, for he had, with his usual good-nature, got himself up as an Italian organ-grinder, monkey and all. ‘The man,’ he said, excitedly, ‘had an organ—and a monkey; and first the man played and then the monkey danced on the top of the organ—and then when the man had finished playing, the monkey jumped down, took *his father’s* hand, and they went away.’ It’s a lovely story, especially when you happen to know Joey,” said Madge, with a mischievous gleam in the brown depths of her great somber eyes.

“Joey’s not a bit like a monkey,” Georgie flashed out.

“No—no,” soothingly; “but ’tis a pretty story, all the same, don’t you think?”

“No, I don’t,” cried Georgie, furiously, “and I be-

lieve you just made it up out of sheer spite, because Joey never takes any notice of you. Like a monkey, indeed! He's not *half* as much like a monkey as you are?"

"Children—children," put in Mrs. Darrell, hastily, "do not tease one another so. What can there be about that very ugly young man to interest either of you?"

"I heard the gate open," added Violet, "so smooth your ruffled plumes, Georgie, and bless the fact that there's no likelihood of your ever being taken for the monkey's mother," and Georgie had to pull herself together and obey, for she was noted throughout Idleminster as a gay, bright, breezy little girl, always as full of life and go as a freshly opened bottle of champagne—and it would not do to lose her character and be found in the bosom of her family in unmistakable sulks. All the same, it was not a very easy task when that little imp of mischief sat throned in Madge's big brown eyes and she had been backed up by two such Job's comforters as her mother and Violet. And almost before she had got her ruffled plumage straight again, Virginie opened the door and announced, "Mistarre Lancaster!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE WHITE DRAGOONS.

"I do much wonder that one man, seeing how much another man is a fool when he dedicates his behaviors to love, will, after he hath laughed at such shallow follies in others, become the argument of his own scorn by falling in love."

Much Ado About Nothing. Act 2, Sc. 3.

SOMEHOW or other, Mrs. Darrell got over the income tax trouble, and also the coal bill; so the coal-house at the

Priory was once more full to overflowing and Georgie was able to repose her shivering little person in the very front of a blazing fire and to stir and smash the burning mass to her heart's content. It was a distinct extravagance on her mother's part to allow it, of course, but it was really more as a defensive measure than anything else. For when there were no men to the front to make the little beauty's plumes lie just the right way and glint and gleam like a burnished pigeon in the sunshine, there was no method of keeping her quiet and in a humor of genial complacency equal to leaving her to work her own sweet will upon a fire of goodly size—and somehow, if Georgie was not well pleased with her circumstances and surroundings, there was not much chance of any ease or comfort for any one else who happened to be living under the same roof.

Early in December there came an invitation for the annual ball given by the officers at the cavalry barracks, and great was the excitement which it caused in the household at the Priory.

The White Dragoons had not been quartered very long at Idleminster, and two regiments had had a spell there since the Royal Horse went off to India. But, as is customary in garrison towns, the friends of regiments which had been there were passed on to the new-comers; and, although the Darrells knew but few of the officers as yet—leave-season having set in almost immediately after they settled down in Ambleditch Barracks—they had duly called on the married people and were on fairly intimate terms with several of them. So, when the first batch of invitations went out the president of the ball committee was

bidden by more than one voice to put down "the widow with the three pretty daughters, who lives up in Amble-ditch. Her name? Oh!—er—Dallas or Darrell. Yes—that is it—Darrell."

"I shall be *obliged* to have a new frock for it," remarked Miss Georgie, when their first little excitement had subsided.

"Out of your allowance, then, Georgie," said her mother, sharply.

"Out of my allowance! Well, I don't see how that's to be done, unless I get it at Hopper's and pay for it by and by," returned Georgie, carelessly.

"And that, you know, I strongly object to," exclaimed her mother. "It is surely bad enough that I have debts which I can not get rid of or clear off, try and save and skimp as I will, without you girls hampering me by running up dress-bills for which I am responsible. And you have a very pretty dress, Georgie—you have only worn your blue three times."

"It has got quite historic by this time," cried Georgie, with a superb air of disdain—then put on a soft little coaxing air and sighed: "Mammie dear, *can't* you squeeze a new frock out for me—just for once?"

"When you came out, Georgie, my dear," said Mrs. Darrell, sadly, "I gave nearly ten pounds for a white silk gown for you, over and above your allowance. Madge has never had an allowance yet. She has contentedly worn anything that I could give her; but now that she is coming out, I really must make her equal to you and Violet.

And how I am to afford a white silk gown for her, I do not know."

"I don't want you to afford it, mother," Madge put in, hurriedly; "I will send up to Liberty's and get some of their pretty soft Indian silk, and Vi will help me to make it—won't you, Vi?"

"Of course I will," replied Violet, promptly.

"It won't cost a third of ten pounds," Madge went on, hopefully, "and those Indian silks wear beautifully; it will last me for ages, and I will manage it out of my allowance, dear; so don't worry about it."

"Then you'll be able to manage a new frock for me very easily," put in Georgie, complacently, in her delight at the idea of new garments forgetting to utter her protest against the absurdity—as she called it—of Madge's being introduced into society at all.

However, Mrs. Darrell stood her ground firmly on the subject of the new frock, and Georgie (when it was plainly intimated to her that if she did not feel inclined to make the historic blue—which she had worn three times—serve for that occasion also, she might successfully solve the difficulty by staying at home) quietly, after her way, forgot all her declarations that it was simply impossible to wear it, and having touched it up here and there, and bidden her devoted slave, Joey Lancaster, send her the freshest and costliest of hot-house flowers to wear in her hair and for her breast-knot, dressed herself for the ball as gayly as if the thought of a new frock had never entered her mind at all. Indeed, being ready and waiting, she condescended to walk round tall and stately Madge, who

looked classic and beautiful in her clinging Indian gown, and informed her that she really looked very nice—very nice and sweet. “Indeed, I shouldn’t at all wonder,” she said, graciously, “if you don’t have a very good time, although, of course, you don’t know any men, and you’re so immensely tall that a good many who would admire you otherwise, would hardly like to ask you to dance with them.”

Madge burst out laughing. “Well, if that is so, I shall not be able to poach on your preserves, Georgie—and any way, I should think your friend, the monkey’s father, would hardly have the audacity to show himself off in a waltz with me.”

“You have the knack of saying disagreeable things, Madge,” said Georgie, with supreme disdain. “I should think he will scarcely ask you to dance when there are so many women he knows. Besides, he would have sent you flowers like mine,” bending to look at the costly sprays upon her bosom, “if he had thought *anything* about you.”

“Poor child,” laughed Madge. “I’m glad he saved his money.”

But for once Georgie was proof against any manner of teasing, and the cab was already waiting at the gate. Virginia came out with the strip of carpet which she always put down for her young ladies on gala nights, and the next moment they were rattling away in the direction of the town.

The ball was—as all large dances given in Idleminster were—held in the Assembly Rooms; and truly they were a

lovely sight that night; enough for the moment to take Madge's breath away almost, though she was careful to hide from Georgie's observant eyes that she was in any way impressed by the, to her, new scene. In the street outside the rooms, stretching away to right and left of the entrance door, were some thirty stalwart dragoons on horseback, shrouded in their big cloaks and bearing each a flaming torch. In the entrance itself stood half a dozen troopers, to give any aid that might be necessary; and within, the vestibule was lined with soldiers in full-dress, who leaned upon their carbines and might have been wooden dummies so still and motionless they stood, had it not been for the ever-watchful gleam of their eyes from under the peaks of their brass helmets.

Then at the entrance to the ball-room itself stood two gorgeous personages, resplendent with gold lace and each of a rotundity of person and a florescence of countenance which spoke volumes for the ease of the life they led. One of these, the senior troop sergeant-major, held a huge silver waiter on which ball programmes were heaped, the other—the regimental sergeant-major—(an awful swell, mind you!) received from each party of guests their card of invitation and bawled out the different names thereon, for the edification of the group of officers within who were waiting to bid them welcome.

When Georgie Darrell had got thus far, she forgot altogether to keep her eye on Madge any longer, and with a sigh of delight gave herself up to the pleasures of the evening. In a moment she was surrounded by a bevy of very young gentlemen in uniform, several militia subalterns,

two men of the Blankshire Regiment, who were doing a spell of musketry-practice with the Chalkshire Regiment, which was represented by Georgie's especial favorites, Teddy St. Oswald, Geoff Hastings, and the redoubtable father of the monkey, Joey Lancaster himself.

With a business-like air, she dispensed her favors—a waltz to one, a polka to another, a square to a third, and so on; and then there was a hue and cry after the privilege of taking her in to supper and for the honor of any extra dances there might be. And finally Georgie went off to join the first dance with the redoubtable Joey, with a card scribbled over in every direction, every space filled and not a dance left to give, even if a royal prince should ask her for it.

“I must just look after my little sister,” she remarked, in her most confidential and sisterly tones, to Joey, when they had taken one turn down the room. “This is her first step into the giddy world, you know.”

“Yes, I suppose so; all the same, nobody would take her for your little sister,” said Joey—“she looks *years* older than you do.”

“Not really,” simpered Georgie; then opened her eyes with their most innocent and baby expression. “Why, *who* is she dancing with?” for Madge, with her clinging ivory robes showing off well against a White Dragoon uniform, was swung slowly past them.

“Oh, that's Lesley,” answered Joey. “Awful swell Lesley is, or thinks himself. Your sister ought to feel herself flattered by his dancing with her.”

“I dare say she does,” returned Georgie rather tartly,

for it was gall and wormwood to her to see Madge thus superbly matched with a partner.

Joey gave an uneasy glance at her—there was an acidity in her tone which he had not often heard before, and which he felt a trifle afraid of, not knowing whether it was due to the little lady's ruffled dignity at his presuming to make such a remark about her sister, or whether she did not like to see that same sister dancing with that particular partner.

As a matter of fact, it was from neither cause that Georgie's tones had turned so suddenly acid, but simply and solely because without a thought she had, after her custom, not to say pride, let her programme be filled up within a few minutes of entering the room; and then to see Madge, the despised younger one, whom she would have kept as a Cinderella at home, who had come to this ball in spite of her, who had worn her old frocks until she got too big to get into them any longer—to see her dancing the very first dance with such a man instead of sitting meekly under her mother's wing and wistfully envying her! And then to realize that her full programme was not worth one such dance, and that she had not the name of a single White Dragon upon it; oh! it was—it was—“Let us take another turn,” she said, crossly.

So they took another turn, and Georgie tried resolutely to avoid seeing what Madge was doing, and to appear as if she was having an unusually good time to herself; to accomplish which she took a more than ordinarily tender tone to Joey.

“Give you another,” she repeated, taking his pro-

gramme. “ *Why* — WHAT’S this? Miss W——, Miss W——, Miss W——. Joey! Do you mean to say that you asked HER before you saw what dances *I* was going to give you? Three waltzes, and you only asked me for two!!!”

CHAPTER VII.

AT A REGIMENTAL BALL.

“ Trifles light as air

Are to the jealous confirmations strong

As proofs of holy writ.”

Othello. Act 3. Sc. 3.

“ You only asked *me* for two!” said Georgie, looking at the wretched Joey with her eyes wide open, more open indeed than he had ever seen them before.

“ The other fellows were so desperately keen after your programme,” the poor young man stammered, his face as scarlet as his tunic, “ and—and—I didn’t think you’d care to give me more than two.”

Georgie, after another searching glance at him, turned her attention again to his programme, which she still held in her little shaking hand. “ And you asked her for supper,” she said, in a very low voice.

“ I didn’t,” Joey blurted out. “ I—at least—that is—she—er—”

“ Asked you—and you couldn’t resist her—that Grenadier!” exclaimed Georgie, in a scathing whisper. “ Very well, you shall give her the seventh as well!” and forthwith she took the little pencil and ran a deep score through

her own name, which was written on the space opposite to the seventh dance on the list.

“Georgie!” he cried, imploringly.

“I will go back to my mother, if you please, Mr. Lancaster,” said Georgie, in supreme contempt.

“I won’t let you off that dance,” he urged, trying the effect of a little bounce upon her.

But Georgie was an adept at “bounce” herself, and the effect of his poor attempt was simply *nil*. “I will go back to my mother, if you please,” she said with freezing politeness.

“I will do anything if you will only forgive me,” he pleaded, abjectly.

“Will you throw her over?” asked Georgie, her anger wavering.

“Throw her over—a lady? Oh! wouldn’t that be a caddish sort of thing to do?” he stammered. “Oh! come, now, Georgie, a fellow would deserve kicking if he did such a thing; and you’d be the first to say so if you weren’t angry—you know you would.”

“I am going back now,” said Georgie, in a furious voice. “If you won’t go with me—I have asked you twice—I can go alone.”

Thus the miserable Joey had no choice but to offer the offended little beauty his arm and escort her across the room to the raised seat where Mrs. Darrell, with several of her friends, was sitting.

“Will you not have an ice?” he asked, as they passed the refreshment-table, which was laid out under the music gallery.

“Thank you — no,” returned Georgie, frigidly. In spite of her anger, I think she would hardly have been able to resist the bribe of an ice, even at the recreant Joey’s hands, had she not caught sight of Madge, who was meting out dances with evidently a none too lavish hand to two officers of the White Dragoons, while Lesley, the one with whom she had danced first, stood by, patiently holding her fan and her ice-plate. The sight was enough to set the wrathful Georgie even against ices, and she marched resolutely to her mother’s side and then dismissed her squire with a stiff little bow which made the lad’s heart thump within his tight tunic as if he were going to have a fit of hysterics.

And after that Joey went mad—at least, years after, in looking back over that night’s doings, he always believed sincerely and truthfully that he was entirely unaccountable for everything that he did. The same kind of feeling must have been working in little Georgie Darrell’s breast, for she too had but little remembrance afterward of what had happened, other than a confused dream of a series of more desperate and violent flirtations than she had ever indulged in in all her life before. Little fool, little fool; but she waited until that seventh dance was over, waited in secret impatience and anxiety to see whether Joey would come and claim it or not, waited and saw him sail out along the polished floor with that—that—Grenadier—that Cochin-China chicken—and then she grew reckless and cared not what she did.

Poor little Georgie! and to add fuel to the fire of her misery, she was conscious all the time that Madge

was having such a lovely time, such a lovely, lovely time.

That was true enough! For Lesley, having been fairly startled by the beauty and grace of Mrs. Darrell's youngest daughter, had, after obtaining an introduction to her, promptly secured a goodly share of the dances on her unfilled programme. "That's the supper-dance," he remarked as he scribbled his initials against a certain waltz—"and you won't let any other fellow take you to supper, will you?"

"Certainly not," Madge replied, with a laugh, "though I don't suppose any one else will be particularly anxious to do so," for it must be remembered that Madge had gone to this ball with but a poor opinion of her own attractiveness toward the menfolk, having been well coached by Georgie as to the likelihood of her not getting more than three or four dances at most. "Though, of course," ended the little beauty in her most sisterly and condescending tones, "Vi and I will do our best to get you partners; only, you know, men don't exactly *like* to be chivvied into dancing with girls to oblige their relations, especially at a big affair like this, where there's no hostess to be civil to—they like choosing their own partners, don't you see?"

And Madge did see—or thought she did—and went off to the ball in humble hopes of getting, by great good luck, a dance or two at most. Judge then of her surprise when she found herself, before she had been in the room ten minutes, faced by this splendid apparition—I use the word advisedly, for Mr. Lesley had not become real flesh and blood to her as yet—in all the glory of his white

tunic profusely embroidered with gold, with his shiny long boots which made an experienced beholder wonder how in the world he managed to get into them, with his smooth crop of sunny hair, his brave gray eyes and the most pleasant smile Madge thought she had ever seen—imagine her surprise when she heard him supplicating, “You won’t let any other fellow take you in to supper, will you?”

Of course it was very pleasant for a beginning; and, in her simplicity, Madge answered that she did not think any one else would be particularly anxious to do so!

“Oh, won’t they though! You wait and see,” said Mr. Lesley.

And by and by Madge did see. But by that time she had got over the splendid apparition sort of feeling and had already begun to think that this Mr. Lesley was the most utterly charming man she had ever known in her whole life—and altogether she was so delightfully and perfectly happy that she never noticed little Georgie’s vagaries or perceived the glances of concentrated fury which that little lady kept casting at her. And at last it all came to an end and poor tired Mrs. Darrell insisted upon taking her daughters away.

“How good you are to have stayed so long,” said Lesley to her in his most winning tones, “more especially as it is Miss Madge’s first large dance. I hope you won’t be utterly knocked up by it; and, by the bye, I think you said I might come and inquire for you to-morrow, did you not?”

“We shall be charmed to see you,” said Mrs. Darrell,

kindly—the elder ladies generally were kind to Lesley, as well as the younger ones.

“And will you be charmed too?” he murmured to Madge as he took her hand.

“Surely I shall,” she answered, frankly.

Three of the four pairs of eyes that looked out from the dingy old cab, rested admiringly on him as he stood on the pavement, with the garish light from the torches flaring down upon his gorgeous uniform of white and gold, and on his sunny head. “What a handsome fellow!” cried Mrs. Darrell, when they had turned the corner of the street.

“Lesley is his name, Madge?” asked Violet.

“He is satisfied enough with himself,” remarked Georgie, tartly, “for a whole regiment. I hate a man of that form.”

“Oh! he’s not your form at all!” said Madge, calmly.

Georgie turned upon her in a fury. “What do you mean? My form—what is my form, pray?”

“Why, Joey Lancaster, of course,” replied Madge, without an instant’s hesitation, and then was horrified to see the gay and brilliant little Georgie suddenly burst out crying.

How shall I describe the scene which followed? Well, I hardly know! Georgie sobbed and raved and stormed, and when at length they reached home, she began quite from the beginning again, and sobbed and raved and stormed yet more. Nor could any one of them extract from her what was the actual cause of the trouble.

“Did you quarrel with Joey?” Vi asked, holding one

little hot hand in hers and speaking in the most soothing accents she could command. "Was that it?"

"I—I—" began Georgie, then burst out afresh, and speech was stopped for the time.

"I thought something was wrong when she came back to me after the first dance," put in her mother. "Come, tell us about it, dear child, it will relieve your mind."

"Oh, cut the little toad, and have no more of his airs and graces," cried Madge, who had kept a full share of her usual common sense in spite of the commotion.

"I *can't* cut him," cried Georgie, fretfully, then began to moan as if bodily agony had suddenly been added to the mental anguish which was tormenting her.

"*Can't* cut him?" repeated Vi. "Why, Georgie, you don't mean to say you care anything about him, that—"

"I hate him!" Georgie burst out, fiercely.

"Then why *can't* you cut him? You are not surely thinking of marrying—why, Georgie, my dear, it's impossible—the boy can not marry any one—he hasn't a penny to bless himself with."

"I'm not going to let her have him," muttered the little beauty, sulkily.

"*Her!* Who?" in utter dismay.

"Why, Flora West, of course. She's got heaps of money, and—and—"

"And if she likes to marry him, a very good thing for you," put in Violet, decidedly. "Why, Georgie, you must have taken leave of your senses! You marry Joey Lancaster!—*you*, with your appearance and your tastes; *you*, who have always said nothing should induce you to

marry any one not rolling in money; *you*, who have complained so bitterly of our small means; *you*, who want horses and carriages, diamonds and gowns without end, men-servants and maid-servants; and will you end with three hundred a year and Joey Lancaster? Why, it is preposterous!"

During this—which was quite a lengthy speech for Violet—Georgie had somewhat pulled herself together and now sat on the hearth-rug resting her elbow on her mother's knee and picking restlessly at the now faded flowers on the bodice of her pretty gown.

"I did not *say* that I was going to *marrg* Joey," she said, half sullenly, half unwillingly; "but, any way, I'm not going to let that Flora West triumph over me. Oh! if you'd seen the way she looked at me to-night! it was enough to make one's blood boil! It was! And he didn't care—after the first—not a scrap. But I'll pay him out for it, see if I don't; just you see if I don't," catching her breath with an angry sob.

"I have no doubt you will," laughed Vi.

"Oh!" chimed in Madge, from the lofty height of seven White Dragoon partners—which, though she did not know it, rankled most bitterly of all in Georgie's gentle heart—"the little toad isn't worth it; take my advice, and—cut him!"

CHAPTER VIII.

GEORGIE'S WRATH.

The life of man is intermingled with hopes and fears, with joys and sorrows, with pleasures and with pains—

BURTON.

As might have been expected, Georgie woke up the next morning with a racking headache, and all the art and patience of the household were brought into play in an endeavor to give her relief.

“Poor little thing, she is so excitable,” Mrs. Darrell said, with indulgent pity, “and really these boys are not worth a ruffled feeling.”

“I’ll take her some tea and dry toast,” said Madge. “She’ll be better by the afternoon—she always is.”

Madge had a delightfully clear way of giving utterance to plain unvarnished truths, which quite took, in this instance, all the gilt off the gingerbread of Georgie’s headache. It left no room for romance or even pity, in fact; neither Mrs. Darrell nor Violet could shut their eyes to the certainty that Georgie’s indisposition was due in stern retributive justice to her own folly, that she was making the most of it, not to say giving herself up to the full enjoyment of it, and that—men visitors being expected that afternoon—it was a moral certainty that toward four o’clock in the day she would find herself recovered of her malady, and would descend from her bower to shed the sweetness and light of her presence upon the occupants of the Priory drawing-room.

Mind, she *said* in actual words no more than I have put down; but she uttered the words as a plain and clear statement of fact, as a distinct forecasting of events which conveyed these ideas to her listeners. "I think a cup of tea would do her good," said Mrs. Darrell, with a little sigh.

However, it was not, after all, the tea which had the desired effect upon the interesting little invalid, for when two o'clock came, the head was no better and the groans no less frequent. Then Virginie came to the rescue.

"I have made *la petite tisane*," she announced. "I am going now to give it to her." And forthwith Virginie emptied out of a saucepan into a large cup a villainous-looking and equally villainous-smelling mixture which seemed, to an ordinary perception, nasty enough to drive out any kind of malady from any human body which could be got to hold it. And, armed with this, Virginie marched upstairs and stood firmly over Georgie while she drank it, even to the very dregs.

Now when Georgie got into Virginie's merciless grip, she knew by the bitter experience of the past that it was useless to try and resist her—therefore she drank, or at least gulped the hot *tisane* as best she could, and how thoroughly she regretted not having cast off the shackles of her headache and got up and about the house, I think nobody who had not enjoyed the privilege of tasting one of the good Virginie's *tisanes* could really credit. Any way, it is certain that when the clock struck the hour of three, she obeyed Virginie's instructions to the letter and got out of bed and dressed herself. It might be that she was—as she said—better, well, in fact; or it might be that she

stood in wholesome dread of another portion of *tisane*—I should not like positively to say which; but certain it is that Madge's prophecy came true, and before four o'clock Georgie was in the drawing-room cozily established in front of the fire and girt with the irresistible charms of all her little invalid airs and graces.

She had not been there more than half an hour before Lesley and another man of the White Dragoons put in an appearance, when straightway she forgot how ill she had been all the day, and bloomed out into her very own self.

But somehow Mr. Lesley did not seem to see the attractiveness of her little ways and devoted himself to Mrs. Darrell and Madge with a blindness to the coquettish little beauty's charms which made her set him down in her own mind as a great stupid oaf, who did not know a pretty or smart girl when he saw one.

And then one or two ladies came in and one or two more men, partners of Violet's these, and last of all, Georgie's especial friends Teddy St. Oswald and young Hastings. But there came no Joey Lancaster!

Somebody asked Madge after awhile if she would not sing something, a request which was very quickly backed up by Lesley, who declared that he adored music, especially vocal music. So Madge sat down at the piano and sung a sad and tender little ballad such as stayed in Lesley's heart afterward in a most unaccountable way:

“ It came with the merry May, love,
It bloom'd with a summer prime,
In a dying year's decay, love,
It brighten'd the fading time;

I thought it would last for a life, love,
But it went with the winter snow,
Only a year ago, love,
Only a year ago!

“ ’Twas a plant with a deeper root, love,
Than the blighting eastern tree,
For it grew in my heart, and the fruit, love,
Was bitter and painful to me;
The poison is yet in my brain, love,
And the thorn in my heart, for you know,
’Twas only a year ago, love,
Only a year ago!

“ It never can bloom any more, love,
For the plow hath passed over the spot,
And the furrow hath left its score, love,
In the place where the flowers are not;
’Tis gone like a tale that is told, love,
Like a dream that hath fled, although
’Twas only a year ago, love,
Only a year ago!”

A man less completely taken with a girl might have fancied that she was singing from the very lowest depths of her heart; but the idea never occurred to Lesley, partly because he was so convinced of her freedom from by-gone affairs of any kind, partly because he was so struck with the expression on the beautiful face of the eldest daughter of the house.

During the song, her mind having gone back to the absent Joey—whom for at least an hour past she had absolutely forgotten—Georgie’s expression changed, and she was now looking the very picture of abject deserted mis-

ery. Not in the least did Lesley know what it meant, but he saw the sudden assumption of dejection and grief, and as neither rôle in the smallest suited Miss Georgie's style of beauty, felt only an inordinate desire to laugh. Then his eyes wandered back to the elder girl's sad face, and he realized that *there* was a grief as real and as lasting as the other was counterfeit and sham.

And then suddenly an idea presented itself to him—"Miss Madge," he said, leaning his arms on the piano, when the murmur of thanks which ran round the room had subsided, and speaking in a voice intended only for her ear, "were not the Royal Horse quartered here before they went to India?"

"I really don't know," Madge answered, looking at Georgie for information.

"Yes, they were," said Georgie, forgetting her dejection. "Why?"

"Did you know a man called Hills in that regiment?" he asked.

"Very well indeed," said Georgie, gayly. "Such a charming fellow! We all liked him immensely," then turned round to Violet. "You remember Mr. Hills, Vi, don't you?—of the Royal Horse."

From the look which leaped into Violet's lovely eyes, Lesley saw that her sister need not have added the last piece of information. "Yes, I remember him," she said, in a strained, unnatural voice. "Why do you ask?"

"Because he is an intimate friend of mine, that is all," replied Lesley, carelessly. "By the bye—you know that he is at home with the depot now, don't you?"

Violet shook her head. "No, I did not know it," she said, and turned abruptly away.

"How was it he did not come to the ball last night?" demanded Georgie. "Did not you ask him?"

"Oh, yes, I asked him, but I could not get him to come," Lesley answered. "Poor chap, I fancy he had some sort of a let-down when he was quartered here, for he answered that he hated balls and loathed Idleminster more than any other spot on the whole face of the earth."

"Idleminster can get on very well without him," responded Georgie, very sharply. "I know for my part I never could bear him; he was never any friend of mine, and I used to wonder how my sister could endure talking to him."

"Your sister was not engaged to him ever, was she?" Lesley asked, in a very diffident kind of tone. "I mean—please don't think me very rude to ask such a question, but—but she seemed to turn away as if—as if—" In truth, he did not know how to go on, though he was longing to get certain information and did not know how to manage it.

"Oh, no!" replied Georgie, promptly. "My sister has never been engaged to any one—never. There was never anything of that kind between her and Mr. Hills."

"Not so sure about that," was Lesley's comment to himself—and then, after a few words more with Madge, he betook himself away, having asked and obtained permission to come again.

One by one the visitors followed his example, and the Darrells were left alone, when Georgie promptly an-

nounced that the effort to keep up had made her head ache worse than ever, and that she should go and lie down on the dining-room sofa, and see if she could not get a little nap! So off she went, leaving her mother and sisters in possession of the drawing-room.

“The valiant Joey never came to make it up,” said Violet, smiling. “*What* a quarrel it must have been!”

“Oh! he was afraid,” returned Madge; “but she will go out on some trifling excuse or other to-morrow, and she’ll bring him back in triumph—see if she does not.”

And again Madge proved herself to be a true prophet, for, sure enough, as soon as lunch was fairly over the following day, Georgie set herself to find out the plans of the others for spending the afternoon, and having discovered them, announced that her headache was not yet gone and that a walk would do her more good than going to a stuffy musical at-home in stupid Ambleditch, and she meant to go out by herself. Madge gave Violet a very meaning “I-told-you-so” glance, and the little beauty was allowed to go her own way without let or hindrance, while the others went off to their party without her.

“No Joey Lancaster here, you see,” murmured Madge to Violet, when they happened to meet in the tea-room. “And that absurd Flora West is watching the door in an agony.”

Violet raised her eyebrows. “What can either of them be thinking of?” she whispered, in reply.

“He’ll be there when we get home,” asserted Madge. “Oh! thanks so much; yes, I take both sugar and cream—horridly unfashionable, isn’t it?”

And again she was right in her prophecy; for when they got home Virginie was just carrying the little red tea-tray out of the drawing-room, and the valiant Joey was lying at his ease in the biggest chair the room contained.

“Oh! here you are, you dissipated people,” cried Georgie, in her airiest manner. “Well, did you have a good time? I almost wished I had gone after all; but I met Mr. Lancaster in town, and he came back to tea with me, so I haven’t been dull!”

CHAPTER IX.

THE FINGER AGAIN.

Lying sometimes assumes the form of equivocation or moral dodging—a kind of lying which a Frenchman once described as walking round about the truth.

S. SMILES.

FOR a few days all went smooth and fair with the housemaid at the Priory. Georgie was as soft as silk and as sweet as honey to every one and, while her mother, together with Violet and Madge, deplored the renewed intimacy with the redoubtable Joey Lancaster, not seeing what good could come of it in any way, they yet were not slow to take fullest advantage of the delightful state of peace which that intimacy brought about.

Without doubt Miss Georgie ruled the roost at the Priory! It was odd that it should be so; nevertheless, it was perfectly true. She took no part in the management of the household, except to find fault; she never made herself useful with needle and thread, as the others did, ex-

cept at rare intervals and for the adornment of her own little person; she never considered the feelings or the comfort of any human being but herself, except she wanted to coax some unusually large favor or service out of that person, when Circe herself could not have been more seductive than Georgie Darrell; and yet, undoubtedly, she was invariably thought of first in every plan of arrangement that was made, and considered far more than any one else in the family.

It was not that they believed in her, that they thought her clever or even intelligent. No; it was simply and solely because Georgie had the power—the power, nay, in her case, it amounted to a gift—of making herself so intolerably disagreeable that, for the sake of peace alone, her mother and sisters had dropped into the habit of endeavoring never to put her out of conceit with herself or her surroundings.

Or stay—I am going rather too far in saying that, for Madge had a wholesome way of letting Miss Georgie have the plain and unvarnished truth now and again, which was as unpalatable to her and as good for her as the stern and unbending Virginie's celebrated *tisanes*.

So, for several days, all went as merrily as possible! Georgie was all smiles and little coquetries, and the redoubtable Joey was in and out of the Priory like the proverbial "dog in a fair." But this blissful state of things did not tend to make Georgie any more lenient than usual to the desires and amusements of others.

"I can't think why that Mr. Lesley is always here," she remarked one day, when that gentleman appeared at the

gate. "Really, he is never off the doorstep. The man is getting a regular nuisance."

"Oh, he'll serve as a pendant to Joey," observed Madge, with a caustic laugh. "I'm sure Joey practically *lives* with us, and it's just as well that he should not be the only man about the place. We might quarrel about him if he were."

"Joey doesn't come to see *you*," said Georgie, with dignity.

"Heaven forbid!" Madge ejaculated, piously; "he'd have a short shrift, as far as this house is concerned, if he did."

"When any men *do* come to see you, Madge, my dear," said Georgie, with a very elder-sister sort of air, "it will be time enough *then* for you to say anything about the shortness or the longness of their shrift. But until then I would really advise you to leave those little caustic speeches unsaid—they sound so jealous."

"I'm not jealous of Mr. Lesley coming to see you, Georgie," said the younger girl, smiling down from her superior height.

"You've no need to be—I like Joey Lancaster much the best of the two," said Georgie, with superb disdain.

"That is a *very* good thing," retorted Madge, with the utmost gravity. "It makes it so pleasant and easy all around for us, doesn't it? And you know what Sannazaro says on that subject, don't you?"

"No, I don't," returned Georgie, sharply, as she put the finishing touches to the feathery masses of her hair.

"'He among mortals,'" Madge quoted, "'may with

most truth be called happy, who, without envying the grandeur of others, with a modest mind is contented with his own fortune.' ”

Georgie was, for the moment, silenced. She understood the drift of the quotation, but quotations were not in her line, and had the effect of confusing her for the time. Still, she saw plainly enough the drift of Madge's remarks; but, instead of setting her wits to answer her sharp-tongued young sister in her own language, she made a sudden resolve (Joey Lancaster and the danger of Flora West's attractions notwithstanding), a resolve which involved the subjugation of Lesley and the painful process—necessity, Georgie would have called it, had she put the idea into words—of letting Madge see, once and for all, that she could not thus flaunt her swaggering White Dragoon in the face of a little beauty like herself because she chose to select her chief favorite from among the subalterns of the Chalkshire Regiment.

And with head and heart filled with this laudable intention, Miss Georgie went gayly down-stairs into the room where Mr. Lesley was placidly chattering with Mrs. Darrell in all ignorance of the little plot to make him alter his entire plan of action for the future.

Now it must be remembered that a suspicion had crept into his mind, born of Miss Georgie's contradictory remarks about his friend Hills of the Royal Horse, that “the little feather-topped beauty” (as he dubbed her) had been in some way the cause of the evident misunderstanding between Hills and Violet Darrell. Of course, as yet, he did not actually *know* that Violet was the girl over

whom Hills had come, in years gone by, such a cropper as to have won for himself not only in his regiment, but almost throughout the entire service, the character of being the most cynical woman-hater who ever lived; but he suspected that it was so from the sudden blanching of Violet's beautiful face at the mention of his friend's name, and from the unmistakable agony which had flooded into her lovely eyes ere she turned away from the piano.

"Oh! is that *you*, Mr. Lesley?" was Georgie's airy greeting; "mammie dear, *what* a poor fire you keep! I assure you, Mr. Lesley, I am the regular stoker of this establishment, only I don't get any wages and scarcely any thanks for keeping the fires in good order. They say I'm extravagant—I say *they're* lazy."

"Let me do that," said Lesley, politely, as Georgie opened the lid of the coal-box.

Georgie gave up the task to him with charming complaisance, and Mrs. Darrell looked on in mingled amusement and wonder at her little daughter's audacity; for, as a general rule, Georgie's way of filling the office of stoker to the household consisted of intimating to somebody else—that is to say, anybody who happened to be handy—that the fire wanted mending.

"Ah! that's quite lovely," Georgie cried, clapping her little dimpled hands together, as she watched the replenishing process from a low and easy chair close to the hearth-rug. "Oh! more—more, Mr. Lesley; you don't half know how to make a fire."

"Georgie—Georgie, the room will be like an oven!" cried poor Mrs. Darrell, in dismay.

“ Yes, I know, mammie dear; that’s what you *al*—ways say,” Georgie returned, airily.

Lesley, however, stayed his hand, and after making up what he believed would be a very cozy and comfortable fire, shut down the lid of the coal-box and went back to his chair again.

“ Where are your sisters?” asked Mrs. Darrell, after a moment’s silence.

“ I really don’t know where Violet is,” Georgie answered; “ Madge is scribbling away for dear life at her everlasting story-telling.”

“ Does she know that Mr. Lesley is here?” inquired the mother, mildly.

“ Oh, yes, dear,” answered Georgie; “ I saw him open the gate and told her who it was.”

Now Lesley, being sharp enough to couple this admission with the little beauty’s well-acted surprise at finding him in the drawing-room when she entered it, and connecting these facts also with his suspicions about Violet and his friend Hills, heard Georgie’s words with a more than doubtful ear and looked upon her coquettish little countenance with a more than doubtful eye; in fact, he said within himself: “ Little devil, *that’s* your game, is it?” and thus Miss Georgie’s little walk round about the truth was taken to no purpose.

In less than five minutes he was rewarded by the entrance of his divinity into the room. She came in quite quietly, but with the air of one who knew whom she would meet, and as Lesley held her fine, well-shaped hand in his and looked into the clear depths of her lovely honest eyes,

he fairly blessed himself that he had not been blinded by the gold-dust of coquetry with which little Georgie had tried to hoodwink him as she had hoodwinked his friend Hills.

“ I scarcely thought I should find you in to-day,” he said. “ Most of our officers have gone up to the Wests’; but I wanted to see you, so I looked in on the chance as I did not know if you were going to the Wests’ or not.”

“ Have they got a party on?” Georgie demanded, wrathfully.

“ Yes; most of our officers have gone on there,” Lesley answered, “ I thought if I found that you had gone, I could follow you.”

“ We were not asked,” cried Georgie, indignantly.

“ The Wests can not ask *everybody*,” put in Madge, with an amused laugh. “ They have such tiny rooms.”

“ They can always find room to ask *all* the men,” Georgie flashed out, at which her three hearers laughed so merrily that even Georgie, in spite of her indignation, was obliged to laugh too.

After that she grew restless, too restless to make any very great endeavor to captivate Lesley; she wandered about the room in an aimless kind of way, and stared out of the window into the gray dark of the winter afternoon, unmistakably watching and waiting. And then when Virginie brought in the tea, and going to the window would have drawn down the blinds and put in the shutters, she stopped her with a piteous but would-be careless “ Oh, *don't* put the shutters in, Virginie; *I'll* do it by and by.”

I am afraid that there was enough malice in Lesley's

nature for him to enjoy the little comedy thoroughly. He happened to know that Joey Lancaster, got up in irreproachable style, with a flower in his button-hole and a cigarette between his lips, had gone up the village, apparently bound for Mrs. West's hospitable domicile, but a minute or two before he himself had come up the road. It was likely enough that he had gone in the full expectation of meeting Georgie there, for, thoroughly as he despised the little beauty from a moral standpoint, Lesley did not pretend for a single moment that in attractiveness she was not infinitely superior to Flora West; but all the same it was a great joke to see her disgust and chagrin at his non-appearance.

Still he did not come, and Georgie was at last reluctantly obliged to leave the window, and come nearer to the tea-table, when Lesley took the opportunity of administering a pin-prick which he had been saving for her benefit ever since he entered the house.

“I am going up to town to-morrow; I've got a few days' leave,” he announced, keeping a careful eye on Georgie. “I'm going to meet Hills—you remember him, Miss Georgie—Hills, of the Royal Horse. And I mean to get to the bottom of his persistent refusal to come to Idleminster.”

Georgie's face was a study!

CHAPTER X.

CYNICAL HILLS, OF THE ROYAL HORSE.

“Believe me, every man has his secret sorrows, which the world knows not; and oftentimes we call a man cold when he is only sad.”

Hyperion.

“I SHALL be back in a few days,” Lesley said to Madge Darrell at parting, “and shall come to see you at once. You are quite sure that there is nothing in town that I can do for you?”

“Oh, nothing, thanks!” Madge answered, gratefully.

In truth, to her “town” did not convey any more real idea of a place where anything could be done for her, more than if Lesley had told her he was just off to Hong Kong and would carry out any commission that she wished him to do there. She had only passed through it once, and that in the early morning, on her way from Liverpool Street to King’s Cross, and the little she had seen of it then had not given her any desire to see it again, or to hanker after bonbons from Buszard’s or perfumes from Rimmel’s. “I hope you will have a very good time,” she said, in her sweet friendly tones.

“I shall be glad to come back again,” he said, significantly, “though, of course, one does get a very good time in London, especially just now, when there is a lot going on. But I am going entirely on old Hills’s account, there is a little mystery in Hills’s past which I believe I can

clear up. I believe I have found the clew to what has puzzled me for several years."

He looked straight at Georgie as he spoke and saw—well, just what he expected to see—the unmistakable signs of guilt. But Madge was, of course, quite in the dark, and though she wondered a little at his words, had no thought whatever of connecting them with either of her sisters. Therefore she bade him "good-bye," and in another moment he was gone.

"How I do dislike that man, to be sure," snapped Georgie as the door closed behind him.

"Why should you dislike him?" Madge asked, with open wonder.

"Well, because I do. He's so disagreeable and so superior."

"He didn't go to the Wests', any way," said Madge, quietly, "and some other people did."

"Oh! Joey only went to see if I was there—if he went at all," Georgie asserted, with superb disdain.

"And stayed to see whether you were going late," said Madge, teasingly.

"I dare say your grand Mr. Lesley has gone there now," Georgie cried. "It's not six yet."

"But I saw him turn the other way and go toward the barracks—and so did you, my dear," returned Madge, laughing. "But there, there, neither of them are worth bickering about. Sit down in front of the fire and get yourself well toasted. Perhaps the valiant Joey will turn up yet, and then you'll be happy."

"How you girls do plague one another," cried Mrs.

Darrell. "And some day when your real troubles come, you'll look back to the days at Ambleditch and make yourselves believe they were all sunshine."

"Yes, dear, I dare say we shall," laughed Madge. "And when we're all married to respectable middle-aged husbands in comfortable circumstances (such as Georgie is always looking forward to) and I have a Georgie of my own, I shall tell her when she is extra frivolous and full of fancies that I don't know who she takes after, certainly not her aunt Georgie who was the sunshine of our lives when we were all girls together."

"I'm not going to marry a middle-aged husband," cried poor Georgie.

"Even Joey would get middle-aged in time, dear," Madge reminded her gently, "though to be sure I don't think he will ever have the other qualifications, poor boy. Listen! was not that the gate? Perhaps it is Joey's own self; I'm sure I hope so, for you will be happy then."

It was Joey, the valiant, the redoubtable, who came in very full of grievances at having been what he called "let in" for the party at the Wests'.

"Why didn't you tell me you weren't going?" Madge heard him grumbling in an under-tone under cover of her music. "I said to you yesterday, 'I shall see you tomorrow,' and you said yes, and of course I went straight up to the Wests' and—" and then his voice dropped lower and lower until Madge could hear no more. Not that she was particularly anxious to do so. She had her own thoughts, her own dreams, her own happiness to occupy her mind; and her opinion of Joey was so small that she

had scarcely the patience to remain in the room to see how Georgie bloomed out like a flower in sunshine because he had come.

But, all the same, Georgie was not happy. If the truth be told, she had perhaps never been so utterly miserable in her life as she was during the few days which followed. True, in Joey's presence, she was, in a measure, able to throw off a horrible fear which stood knocking at the door of her heart, a horrible fear which had been standing there for years waiting for a chance of making itself heard—a horrible fear whose name was "Found out."

And as, owing to his duties and the ordinary usages of society, Joey could not take up a permanent residence at the Priory, there were many hours of the day, and all the long and weary hours of the night, when she had to stand and face that grim specter and curse the very day when she had been foolish enough to give it standing-room, and speculate on the very slender chance of its existence passing unnoticed by those whom she would fain keep in ignorance of it. A vain hope, a very vain hope. For, blind herself as she would, she could not shut out from her moral vision the stern fact that Lesley knew, and that Lesley did not mean to keep his knowledge to himself.

How she hated Lesley! Doubtless, he had already betrayed her to Hills, and they were laying their heads together how they might best humiliate and discomfit her.

But, in actual fact, it was not so. For Hills had not been able to get his leave for town until Lesley had been three days enjoying the delights of the center of civilization. But, certainly, when they met, Lesley lost no time

in satisfying his curiosity—at least, that is the way one would put it if one was speaking of a woman! As he belonged to that stern sex which knows not the meaning of the word “curiosity,” except as a very unpleasant feminine attribute, it will be best to say that he lost no time in trying to set his best friend’s very crooked love affairs straight, and in trying to turn his long-soured milk of human kindness back to its original sweetness.

Lesley had put up at his usual hotel, and there Hills had joined him; they dined together, looked in at a theater, and did a couple of evening crushes afterward. And toward two in the morning they found themselves the sole occupants of the hotel smoking-room, with a good fire and each man a whisky and seltzer at his elbow. So then, having waited patiently for several hours, Lesley waited no longer than to see his friend’s pipe set fairly a-going.

“Old chap,” he began, “we’ve been friends for a good while, you and I.”

“Ever since we first saw one another,” returned Hills, with what, for him, was a burst of heartiness.

“Well, old chap,” said Lesley, not looking at Hills at all, but staring fixedly into the fire, “I believe it’s just on the cards I may be able to do you a devilish good turn, and it sha’n’t be my fault if I don’t do it.”

“Ah!” murmured Hills, in a questioning tone. “Yes?”

“I may say anything I like without offense?”

“Of course,” said Hills, wondering what in the wide world the fellow was driving at.

“Well, you know,” Lesley went on, sighing a little,

“you used to be the jolliest old cock in the Royal Horse, or out of it for that matter.”

“Did I?” put in Hills, doubtfully.

“Yes, you did, old chap—and then, all at once, you changed—altered—went to pot as far as your old self was concerned.”

“Men do alter,” Hills admitted, finding that Lesley waited for him to say something, and not feeling at that moment at all in the mood for saying it.

“Yes, I dare say men do alter, when they’ve got something to alter for, not else,” Lesley persisted. “You altered just about the time the Royal Horse went to India, and I—I want to do you a service, old chap, so if I blunder over it a bit, you won’t think anything of it, will you? but I want you to tell me if Violet Darrell—” but there Hills gave a great start and Lesley stopped short. “I—I—didn’t mean to offend you, old fellow,” he ended, apologetically.

“I didn’t say you had offended me,” said Hills, in a choked sort of voice; and then there was a long silence between them, during which Hills pulled hard and fast at his pipe and Lesley let his go out.

It was very uncomfortable; and poor Lesley turned and twisted in his chair, wondering how he should manage to break the ice and get on with what he had to say. At last, in sheer desperation, he blundered on:

“The fact is, old chap, since we’ve been in Idleminster, I’ve been pretty intimate with the Darrells, in fact, I’ve seen a good deal of them, and—”

“Look here,” Hills interrupted, sternly, “you mean

well, Lesley, old chap—you and Driver Dallas are the two best friends I ever had in my life; I know you mean well. But let that subject be; I can't stand it. I'll tell you now what you want to know, but let it be once for all. It was Violet Darrell I loved—God help me, poor, unsuspecting beggar that I was! I thought she cared for me; perhaps she did, any way she led me on when she was engaged to another man, and whether it was him or me she cared for I didn't wait to find out. I had found her out for the d—dest jilt that ever lived, and I washed my hands of her for good and all. You're right; it does sour a fellow when a thing like that happens to him; it soured me—sour I am, and sour I shall be to the end of the chapter."

"One question, and I have done," said Lesley. "Who told you she was engaged to another man?"

"Her own sister," cried Hills; "so there!"

"I knew it!" cried Lesley, almost with a shout of triumph, "I knew it! Hills, old boy, shake hands with me, for I've circumvented that scheming little devil at last. Listen to me: Violet Darrell was never engaged to any one in her life, never; it was a deliberate lie of that Georgie's to get you for herself. And Violet is free—cares for you yet, old chap—has never cared for another fellow at all!"

"Lesley," cried Hills, his lips beginning to tremble and his face to whiten in spite of himself.

"It's true," Lesley cried; "I tell you she turned as white as death when I mentioned your name, and I never rested till I felt as sure as I could be that Georgie was at the bottom of it. It's all true, as true as gospel; for I

tell you I'm utterly gone on the other sister, Madge, the one you've never seen—and *Madame Georgie* tried the same game on me! That was how I found her out."

CHAPTER XI.

FOUND OUT.

"Believe me, upon the margin of celestial streams alone those simples grow which cure the heartache."

Hyperion.

He who devises evil for another, falls at last into his own pit, and the most cunning finds himself caught by what he had prepared for another.

METASTASIO.

FOR full two minutes Hills sat staring at Lesley as if he could not believe his own ears.

"Are you quite sure of what you're saying?" he asked, at last, in incredulous tones.

"I am perfectly sure," Lesley answered, steadily.

"And she has never been engaged to any one?"

"Never!" Lesley asserted, positively.

"But—but why on earth should her own sister—" Hills began, when his friend cut him short.

"Look here, old chap," he said, brusquely, "it's just this way. Georgie Darrell is an arrant little coquette—a flirt—an unscrupulous, mischief-making liar, as wicked as she is high—that's in plain English the long and the short of the whole business. She spends all her time laying herself out to please any young tadpoles in the shape of militia subs that may be going in Idleminster sassiety;

and then when either of her sisters attracts an older or more eligible man, she's that infernally jealous she can't rest till she has got hold of them—or had a try to, which is the same thing as far as she is concerned. Why, the very day before I came up to town, I went up to the Priory in the afternoon, and was chatting with Mrs. Darrell, when in she came. 'Oh! is that you, Mr. Lesley?' says she, with as much astonishment in her false little voice and on her false little face as if I'd been out in India for ten years and hadn't served half my time. And then after a bit she forgot all that, and pretended Madge was busy writing and wasn't coming down at all. Mrs. Darrell asked if Madge knew I was there. 'Oh, yes,' she answered, airily, 'for I was at the window and saw him open the gate. I told Madge who it was!' Why, when first I spoke about you to the Darrells at all, she bridled up as if you'd been her special property. 'You remember him, Vi, *don't* you?' she said. 'Oh! he was a *great* friend of ours—such a *nice* fellow.' ”

Hills suddenly got up from his chair and knocked his pipe out against the edge of the chimney-shelf. "I'm going to bed, old fellow," he said, abruptly—"don't think me ungrateful—you've done me a devilish good turn, and I shall never forget it. But I can't talk about it just yet, and I want to get away and think it over quietly by myself."

"And you'll come back to Idleminster with me?" said Lesley, anxiously.

"I shall go down to-morrow," answered the other, promptly.

“Then I shall go back with you,” said Lesley, cheerfully.

“Oh, no need for that; your leave is not up yet,” protested Hills.

“Leave!” repeated Lesley, with a huge contempt such as ought to have cut off all his leave for a twelvemonth to come. “Oh! leave be blowed! Why, my dear chap, I wouldn’t miss Madame Georgie’s face when she first sets eyes on *you* for all the leave I could squeeze out of my next ten years’ service,” and then at last the awed gravity on Hills’s face relaxed, and they both went off into fits of laughter.

So, surely enough, the following morning found the two men on the platform at King’s Cross, looking out their places for the North express; and, not unnaturally, a few hours later—that is to say, between five and six of the afternoon—when Virginie had carried the tea-tray into the Priory drawing-room, she was summoned to the door by a vigorous pull at the bell which sent a loud peal resounding through the house. And on going to see who had made such a commotion she found Lesley and another gentleman waiting for admittance.

“Virginie,” said Lesley, slipping something into her hand—“who is at home?”

“The young ladies, sir,” Virginie answered, with a smile.

“Not madame?”

“Madame is making visits in the village,” the French woman answered. “I expect her at any moment.”

“Virginie, show this gentleman into the dining-room.

Yes, I see you remember him, and after a minute or so fetch Miss Darrell—Miss Violet, you know—out on some excuse or other, and send her in there. He wants to speak to her at once—you understand?”

“Perfectly, monsieur,” returned Virginie, with a comprehensive glance at Hills, whom she did not recognize so thoroughly as Lesley imagined.

“Go along, old chap,” said Lesley. “Now, perhaps you’ll show me in, Virginie.”

So Virginie opened the drawing-room door and announced “Mis-tarre Les-lee” in her usual manner; and, as Lesley expected, the three girls were there, and also the redoubtable Joey.

He could not be blind to the nervous start which Georgie gave on seeing him; but the presence of the valiant Joey gave her a good deal more courage than she would otherwise have had, and she, by an effort, rose to the occasion airily enough; indeed, she was the first to jump off her seat and greet the new-comer.

“We could not imagine who it was,” she exclaimed. “There seemed to be quite a consultation going on outside the door.”

“I was inquiring after the excellent Virginie’s health,” said Lesley, imperturbably. “Virginie and I are great friends, and I have not seen her for several days.”

“Virginie ought to be flattered,” cried Georgie, with a ringing laugh, which somehow sounded a little forced and false in Lesley’s expectant ears.

“Did you have a good time in London?” she inquired, when he had greeted her sisters and nodded to Joey.

“The best I ever remember,” said Lester, promptly.

Georgie gave a sigh, “*How* nice! How I wish *we* could go up to London for a few days and have a good time.”

“Mademoiselle,” said Virginie, appearing at the door at that moment, “*pardon*, but could I speak to you for one moment?”

“Certainly, Virginie,” said Violet, rising at once, then glanced at the two men. “You will excuse me?”

“Dear me — more mysterious communications,” remarked Georgie, flippantly, and wondered what the smile which flickered for an instant under Lesley’s mustache could possibly mean.

However, she did not desert the drawing-room and the two men to satisfy her curiosity on the subject of what she called Virginie’s “mysterious communication” to Violet. On the contrary, she stayed and did her very best by her manner to Joey Lancaster to show Lesley how very little she desired to attract him. And the valiant Joey—not unmindful of the White Dragoon’s occasional look of disgusted disdain—sunned himself in the light of the little beauty’s smiles with quite an idea that he was having a favored time at the expense of the other man; in short that Lesley was furiously jealous of him!

Meantime, Violet had followed Virginie out into the hall. “What is it, Virginie?” she asked, expecting that it was some tiresome tradesman who had sent in a tiresome bill “to wait for an answer.”

“There is some one for you in the dining-room, mad’moiselle,” answered Virginie, then pushed her gently into the room and softly closed the door behind her.

Still unsuspecting of the truth, Violet walked into the middle of the room, and—and then Hills turned round from the hearth-rug where he had been standing, and faced her.

“Violet,” he said, humbly, “don’t you know me? Have you forgotten me?”

“Mr. Hills!” she exclaimed, turning very white, and making an involuntary movement of her hands toward him—a movement that was not lost on Hills any more than the fact that they were trembling violently.

He went a step or two toward her and caught her hands in his. “I have no right to come back,” he said, very meekly, “but I went away like a fool for the sake of a lie; I have no right ever to expect you to look at me again, ever to speak to me again, for I went away in anger with you, believing a lie against you that I ought to have known, knowing you, was a lie. But if I sinned against you, my darling,” he went on, holding her hand close against his breast—“I have suffered during these years. Oh! my God, what have I not suffered, for my life has been one hell of regret, of misery, of yearning and hungering for you; and now I have come back, not what I was—I won’t pretend it—but soured and hardened, and, in a measure, a broken man altogether, to ask your forgiveness for the doubt I have had of you, to ask your infinite pity, to beg that you won’t send me away—” and then, all at once, Hills—cynical Hills, the sneering, gibing hater of women—(if only the Royal Horse or Driver Dallas could have seen him!)—set the little hands free and took Violet Darrell into his arms, and the next moment she was

sobbing her heart out upon his breast. It was all right then, and in those few moments, brief, precious, fleeting as they were, Hills had got rid of the lion's share of his cynicism and his hardness and was a long way back upon the road to being the Hills whom Violet Darrell had learned to love before ever the Royal Horse went off to the shining East.

"And you have loved me all along?" he said, half bewildered, when a little time had gone by.

"All along," sighed she, with ineffable contentment in her looks and tones.

"And are you not even going to ask me what the lie was that parted us?" he asked, holding her closer still.

But Violet shook her head. "I thought of nothing, only that you had come back," she said, simply.

"Oh, God! To think I doubted you," he cried, in keenest self-reproach. "My darling, in your angelic goodness you have taken me back; but I am not fit for you—I am not fit to lie down under your feet and let you trample on me. I—"

"What was it that you heard?" she asked.

He hesitated for an instant. "I heard that all the time I had been trying to win you, you were engaged to another man."

"But what nonsense; how could that be? You might have known, you ought to have known that it was not true," she cried. "It was so absurd that I can't understand your being deceived by it, or believing it for a moment. And who told you this wonderful story?"

"Must I tell you?"

“Yes,” she said, firmly, “you must tell me.”

“It was your sister,” he said, quietly.

“My sister? What—Georgie?”

“Your sister Georgie,” he answered.

For a moment she was silent. “I don’t see how you can be blamed for believing it,” she said at last. “You are sure you made no mistake? She said it in plain English?”

“In plain English,” he said, in a tone which admitted of no doubt.

Violet drew a deep breath. “She is my sister,” she said, slowly, at last. “And if my mother comes to hear of it, it will kill her. Will you be content to keep silence if I ask you—for my mother’s sake?”

“Oh, my darling!” he began, passionately, and just then the door opened and Georgie burst in, stopping short as she caught sight of Hills.

“Georgie,” said Violet, sternly, catching her by the arm, “what have you to say for yourself?”

“Mr. Hills,” Georgie gasped — “Mr. Hills—I—I—” and then she reeled aside and fell to the floor like a log of wood.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LITTLE FOOL!

“Whither my heart has gone, there follows my hand, and not elsewhere.

For when the heart goes before, like a lamp, and illumines the pathway,

Many things are made clear, that else lie hidden in darkness.”

Evangeline.

IT was a long time before Georgie came to her own senses again; when she did she sat up and, resting her head against Virginie, who had been hurriedly called on the scene by Violet, looked languidly round the room. And by that time she was herself again.

“Is it really *you*, Mr. Hills?” she said, in a tone of languid astonishment. “Do you know, for a minute I thought it was your ghost or something! *How* you startled me!”

“You had better go up to your room and lie down,” said Violet, coldly. “There was not the least need for you to make such an exhibition of yourself as to faint and all that. If mother finds you like this she will be frightened to death.”

“*I* nearly was,” said Georgie, closing her eyes again and leaning heavily against Virginie. “Really, I think—though, of course, Mr. Hills, I’m enchanted to see you—it’s very inconsiderate of people to come unawares upon one in that way. It’s so startling.”

“Especially when one has not had time to get one’s defense ready,” said Violet, with cold disdain.

Georgie flushed up with a very pretty show of indignation. “Defense! What do you mean, Violet? What have I to defend myself against? I don’t understand you in the very least. Pray explain yourself.”

“I will,” answered Violet, her eyes gleaming dangerously, and with a light which neither Georgie nor Hills had ever seen in their gentle depths before. “You told Mr. Hills here some time ago—before the Royal Horse went to India, in fact—that I was engaged to some man—and that was why Mr. Hills never came to see me one afternoon when *you knew* I was waiting for him—that was why he went to India without asking me to marry him. You have known this all along; and just now when you saw that he had come back and that you were found out, you were so frightened you fainted right away. Oh, yes, you fainted honestly enough. I’ve seen you faint a good many times, and this time it was genuine; you might have come round a little quicker,” she ended in disgust—“but that is a detail.”

Georgie sat up and pushed Virginie away from her, and started at her sister with surprise which was the very essence of superb acting.

“The mischief you have made—why, and with what possible reason you ever did it, I can not think, except that it was to gratify your inordinate vanity—is as much repaired now as it can ever be,” Violet went on, sadly; “and for our mother’s sake, not to spare you in any way, I will keep silence about it. She has had troubles enough;

it is no use worrying her by telling what she knows in her heart already—that you are as false as you are high.”

By this time Miss Georgie had collected her senses sufficiently to speak. And speak she did to some purpose.

“I was *never*,” she said, in slow and deliberate accents, “so insulted in the whole course of my life. You will keep silence for our mother’s sake! Indeed you need do nothing of the kind, for my mother shall hear these vile accusations which you have brought against me the very instant she enters the house! As for *you*,” turning like a fury upon Hills, who was well-nigh struck dumb by her audacity, “how *dare* you say that I told you my sister was engaged to any one?”

“You did tell me so,” Hills said, promptly.

“*Never!*” Georgie cried, indignantly. “I could not tell you such a thing—it wouldn’t have been true.”

“I know now that it was not true,” said Hills, steadily; “but at the time you told me, I believed you—to my cost.”

“And you say you went to India believing that I had told you my sister was engaged?”

“Yes.”

“And was that the reason you did not ask her to marry you then?”

“That was so.”

Georgie burst into a shrill peal of laughter.

“Why, you must have been mad or dreaming,” she cried. “I put it to you, why should I say anything so preposterous, so outrageous? You were a good match in every way for her; it would have been a good thing for us

all that you should have married her. It—it—is so absurd, it's such a foolish charge to bring against me, for you can not be vain enough to think that I ever cared for you."

"I did not think that," Hills admitted.

"Then you must have dreamed it," Georgie exclaimed.

"I don't think I dreamed it," he said, not liking to take a harder stand against a woman who was plainly driven into a corner and was making such a determined and plucky fight to get out of it.

Georgie saw her advantage and seized it in a moment. "*You don't think—* Ah! then you are not quite sure! Well, I am; and that I never said or thought of saying any such thing. It's not been very pleasant for me—all this—but I'm not malicious, and so, as Violet says, for our mother's sake, I will say nothing more about it. But the next time, Violet, my dear," she ended, airily, "you feel inclined to denounce any one, just wait till you've heard the other side of the story before you begin. It's the wisest and the least unpleasant thing to do—take my word for it—" and then she quietly slipped out of the room and left Violet and Hills together, Virginie having betaken herself discreetly away some little time before.

For a minute or so the long-parted lovers stood staring at each other in blank amazement; then Hills burst out laughing at the cleverness and the utter absurdity of it all—a heartier laugh than had passed his lips since the day when the Royal Horse marched out of Idleminster bound for the shining East.

"What am I to do?" Violet asked.

“Do?” he echoed. “Why, you can’t do anything. We are routed, horse, foot, and dragoons. I never saw such superb dash in my life. Heavens, what a general she’d make!”

“Shall I have to sit down and pocket it all quietly?” Violet exclaimed.

“Yes, and say ‘Thank you,’ into the bargain,” Hills rejoined. “What else can you do? There is only my word against hers. I’ve no absolute proof one way or the other.”

“And we have always called Georgie a fool!” cried Violet, with bewildered admiration.

“Then you were wrong—she is no fool,” said he, decidedly; “quite the contrary for that matter, for she’s simply as clever as daylight.”

But, all her cleverness notwithstanding, Miss Georgie did not get off quite so easily as she seemed, at one time, about to do; for that exceedingly plain-spoken and inconvenient young person, Madge, had something to say on the subject. And she chose to say it that very night, when Georgie was just brushing out her feathery golden hair in preparation for going to bed.

“I say, Georgie,” she began, marching into the little beauty’s room followed by Violet, “Violet’s been telling me something about you to-day, and I want to speak to you.”

“About me? Well, what is it?” said Georgie, sharply, and brushing away at her hair as if dear life depended on it.

“Yes; Violet has told me all about it,” said Madge, in a very matter-of-fact tone.

“I think Violet would have done better to have held her tongue,” returned Georgie, sharply, “considering that I was more grossly insulted than I ever was in my life before.”

“Yes; but all the same you did tell Mr. Hills, you know,” said Madge, coolly.

“Madge!” cried Georgie, warningly.

“Yes; I know you’re very good at that sort of thing,” said Madge, quietly; “injured innocence and outraged truth and all the rest; but you’ve been pretty miserable the last few days, Georgie, and you know it; in fact, you never were quite so wretched in all your life before; you haven’t been able to settle to anything; you haven’t eaten or taken any interest in life at all. You’ve scarcely slept; and when—you—did—sleep—you—*had—dreams.*”

“Dreams!” Georgie cried.

“Yes, dreams! Only last night I heard you moaning and crying in your sleep, and I came in to see if you were ill or anything. But no, you were asleep; you were dreaming—dreaming about Mr. Hills. Now, if what he told Violet to-day was a lie, what did you want to be dreaming about it for last night? Tell me that.”

“What did I say?” Georgie faltered.

“Ah! we are getting at the truth now,” Madge murmured to Violet. “Well, you said just this—just in this way: ‘Oh! no—no—Mr. Hills, *don’t* tell Violet. I never meant it really—I never did. She isn’t engaged to any one; it was only a joke; and—and I shall *die* if you tell her’—and then you went off into sobs and indistinct moans, and I went back to bed enlightened not a little, I can assure you.”

There was a long silence; but at last Violet broke it. "Have you anything to say?" she asked, contemptuously.

Georgie only shook her head, and the elder girl rose to her feet. "You lied remarkably well this afternoon," she said, in cutting tones. "It is an accomplishment you possess to perfection; but you need not bring it into family use again. I am going to marry Captain Hills, and Madge is safely engaged to Mr. Lesley; so you had better keep all your art in that way for Joey Lancaster's benefit, and if you can prevent him from finding out what a false little Jezebel you are, it will serve you a good turn yet;" and then she took Madge's hand and they went out, leaving the little beauty by herself with all her feathery golden hair hiding her face.

Now it happened that the following afternoon Mrs. Darrell was sitting by the fire in the Priory drawing-room alone. Violet and Madge were both out, probably with their respective swains, and only Georgie was at home.

She came sidling up to her mother with her most coquettish and coaxing air, and sat herself down on the hearth-rug, resting her pretty golden head against her mother's knee.

"Mammie darling," she began, "would you do something for me?"

"If I can," said Mrs. Darrell, indulgently.

"Well, you know, dear, we have always said—we girls—that we must marry *some* money."

"It is desirable," Mrs. Darrell admitted.

"And Vi and Madge are both very lucky; they are

going to marry money," Georgie went on; "but, mammie darling, *I* want to marry *all* for love; and—and—he hasn't much money, poor Joey—"

"*Not* that Joey!" cried Mrs. Darrell, in dismay.

"Mammie dear, I do love him so," Georgie cried. "And I'm not like the others; I couldn't count money and all that in comparison with love; you'll be kind to him, won't you, darling, when he comes to see you about it?"

"But what are you going to live on?" Mrs. Darrell cried.

"On the dinner of herbs where love is," said Georgie, with beautiful seriousness. "Only say 'yes,' dear, and I shall never grudge my sisters their stalled oxen, though I have been credited all my life with being a vain and selfish little fool."

"And to think," said Mrs. Darrell afterward to Madge, "that of you three, the one to give up all for love should be *Georgie!*"

THE END.



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- 731 The Bayou Bride..... 20
- 857 Kildee; or, The Sphinx of the Red House. 1st half..... 20
- 857 Kildee; or, The Sphinx of the Red House. 2d half..... 20
- Robert Buchanan's Works.**
- 145 "Storm-Beaten:" God and The Man..... 20
- 154 Annan Water..... 20
- 181 The New Abelard..... 10
- 398 Matt: A Tale of a Caravan... 10
- 646 The Master of the Mine..... 20
- 892 That Winter Night; or, Love's Victory..... 10
- 1074 Stormy Waters..... 20
- 1104 The Heir of Linne..... 20
- Captain Fred Burnaby's Works.**
- 375 A Ride to Khiva..... 20
- 384 On Horseback Through Asia Minor..... 20
- E. Fairfax Byrrne's Works.**
- 521 Entangled..... 20
- 538 A Fair Country Maid..... 20
- Hall Caine's Works.**
- 445 The Shadow of a Crime..... 20
- 520 She's All the World to Me..... 10
- Mrs. H. Lovett Cameron's Works.**
- 595 A North Country Maid..... 20
- 796 In a Grass Country..... 20
- 891 Vera Nevill; or, Poor Wisdom's Chance..... 20
- 912 Pure Gold..... 20
- 963 Worth Winning..... 20
- 1025 Daisy's Dilemma..... 20
- 1028 A Devout Lover; or, A Wasted Love..... 20
- 1070 A Life's Mistake..... 20
- Rosa Nouchette Carey's Works.**
- 215 Not Like Other Girls..... 20
- 396 Robert Ord's Atonement..... 20
- 551 Barbara Heathcote's Trial. 1st half..... 20
- 551 Barbara Heathcote's Trial. 2d half..... 20
- 608 For Lilius. 1st half..... 20
- 608 For Lilius. 2d half..... 20
- 930 Uncle Max. 1st half..... 20
- 930 Uncle Max. 2d half..... 20
- 932 Queenie's Whim. 1st half..... 20
- 932 Queenie's Whim. 2d half..... 20
- 934 Wooded and Married. 1st half. 20
- 934 Wooded and Married. 2d half. 20
- 936 Nellie's Memories. 1st half... 20
- 936 Nellie's Memories. 2d half... 20
- 961 Wee Wife..... 20
- 1033 Esther: A Story for Girls..... 20
- 1064 Only the Governess..... 20
- 1135 Aunt Diana..... 20
- Lewis Carroll's Works.**
- 462 Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. Illustrated by John Tenniel..... 20
- 789 Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There. Illustrated by John Tenniel.. 20
- Wilkie Collins's Works.**
- 52 The New Magdalen..... 10
- 102 The Moonstone..... 20
- 167 Heart and Science..... 20
- 168 No Thoroughfare. By Dickens and Collins..... 10
- 175 Love's Random Shot, and Other Stories..... 10
- 233 "I Say No;" or, The Love-Letter Answered..... 20
- 508 The Girl at the Gate..... 10
- 591 The Queen of Hearts..... 20
- 613 The Ghost's Touch, and Percy and the Prophet..... 10
- 623 My Lady's Money..... 10
- 701 The Woman in White. 1st half 20
- 701 The Woman in White. 2d half 20
- 702 Man and Wife. 1st half..... 20
- 793 Man and Wife. 2d half..... 20

764	The Evil Genius.....	20
896	The Guilty River.....	20
946	The Dead Secret.....	20
977	The Haunted Hotel.....	20
1020	Armadale. 1st half.....	20
1020	Armadale. 2d half.....	20
1095	The Legacy of Cain.....	20
1119	No Name. 1st half.....	20
1119	No Name. 2d half.....	20

Mabel Collins's Works.

740	Lord Vanecourt's Daughter...	20
828	The Prettiest Woman in Warsaw	20

Hugh Conway's Works.

240	Called Back.....	10
251	The Daughter of the Stars, and Other Tales.....	10
301	Dark Days.....	10
302	The Blatchford Bequest.....	10
502	Carriston's Gift.....	10
525	Paul Vargas, and Other Stories	10
543	A Family Affair.....	20
601	Slings and Arrows, and Other Stories.....	10
711	A Cardinal Sin.....	20
804	Living or Dead.....	20
830	Bound by a Spell.....	20

J. Fenimore Cooper's Works.

60	The Last of the Mohicans.....	20
63	The Spy.....	20
309	The Pathfinder.....	20
210	The Prairie.....	20
318	The Pioneers; or, The Sources of the Susquehanna.....	20
349	The Two Admirals.....	20
359	The Water-Witch.....	20
361	The Red Rover.....	20
373	Wing and Wing.....	20
378	Homeward Bound; or, The Chase.....	20
379	Home as Found. (Sequel to "Homeward Bound").....	20
380	Wyandotte; or, The Huttet Knoll.....	20
385	The Headsman; or, The Ab- baye des Vignerons.....	20
394	The Bravo.....	20
397	Lionel Lincoln; or, The Leag- uer of Boston.....	20
400	The Wept of Wish-Ton-Wish..	20
413	Afloat and Ashore.....	20
414	Miles Wallingford. (Sequel to "Afloat and Ashore").....	20
415	The Ways of the Hour.....	20
416	Jack Tier; or, The Florida Reef	20
419	The Chainbearer; or, The Lit- tle-page Manuscripts.....	20
420	Satanstoe; or, The Littlepage Manuscripts.....	20
421	The Redskins; or, Indian and Injin. Being the conclusion of the Littlepage Manuscripts	20
422	Precaution.....	20
423	The Sea Lions; or, The Lost Sealers.....	20
424	Mercedes of Castile; or, The Voyage to Cathay.....	20

425	The Oak-Openings; or, The Bee-Hunter.....	20
431	The Monikins.....	20
1062	The Deerslayer; or, The First War-Path. 1st half.....	20
1062	The Deerslayer; or, The First War-Path. 2d half.....	20
1170	The Pilot.....	20

Marie Corelli's Works.

1068	Vendetta! or, The Story of One Forgotten.....	20
1131	Thelma. 1st half.....	20
1131	Thelma. 2d half.....	20

Georgiana M. Craik's Works.

450	Godfrey Helstone.....	20
606	Mrs. Hollyer.....	20

B. M. Croker's Works.

207	Pretty Miss Neville.....	20
260	Proper Pride.....	10
412	Some One Else.....	20
1124	Diana Barrington.....	20

May Crommelin's Works.

452	In the West Countrie.....	20
619	Joy; or, The Light of Cold- Home Ford.....	20
647	Goblin Gold.....	10

Alphonse Daudet's Works.

534	Jack.....	20
574	The Nabob: A Story of Parisian Life and Manners.....	20

Charles Dickens's Works.

10	The Old Curiosity Shop.....	20
22	David Copperfield. Vol. I.....	20
22	David Copperfield. Vol. II..	20
24	Pickwick Papers. Vol. I.....	20
24	Pickwick Papers. Vol. II.....	20
37	Nicholas Nickleby. 1st half..	20
37	Nicholas Nickleby. 2d half..	20
41	Oliver Twist.....	20
77	A Tale of Two Cities.....	20
84	Hard Times.....	10
91	Barnaby Rudge. 1st half.....	20
91	Barnaby Rudge. 2d half.....	20
94	Little Dorrit. 1st half.....	20
94	Little Dorrit. 2d half.....	20
106	Bleak House. 1st half.....	20
106	Bleak House. 2d half.....	20
107	Dombey and Son. 1st half...	20
107	Dombey and Son. 2d half....	20
108	The Cricket on the Hearth, and Doctor Marigold.....	10
131	Our Mutual Friend. 1st half.	20
131	Our Mutual Friend. 2d half..	20
132	Master Humphrey's Clock....	10
152	The Uncommercial Traveler..	20
168	No Thoroughfare. By Dickens and Collins.....	10
169	The Haunted Man.....	10
437	Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit. 1st half.....	20
437	Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit. 2d half.....	20
439	Great Expectations.....	20
440	Mrs. Lirriper's Lodgings.....	10
447	American Notes.....	20

448 Pictures From Italy, and The Mudfog Papers, &c.....	20	136 "That Last Rehearsal," and Other Stories.....	10
454 The Mystery of Edwin Drood.	20	166 Moonshine and Marguerites...	10
456 Sketches by Boz. Illustrative of Every-day Life and Every- day People.....	20	171 Fortune's Wheel, and Other Stories.....	10
676 A Child's History of England.	20	284 Doris.....	10
Sarah Doudney's Works.		312 A Week's Amusement; or, A Week in Killarney.....	10
338 The Family Difficulty.....	10	342 The Baby, and One New Year's Eve.....	10
679 Where Two Ways Meet.....	10	390 Mildred Trevanion.....	10
F. Du Boisgobey's Works.		404 In Durance Vile, and Other Stories.....	10
82 Sealed Lips.....	20	486 Dick's Sweetheart.....	20
104 The Coral Pin. 1st half.....	20	494 A Maiden All Forlorn, and Bar- bara.....	10
104 The Coral Pin. 2d half.....	20	517 A Passive Crime, and Other Stories.....	10
264 Piédouche, a French Detective	10	541 "As It Fell Upon a Day"....	10
328 Babiolo, the Pretty Milliner. First half.....	20	732 Lady Branksmere.....	20
328 Babiolo, the Pretty Milliner. Second half.....	20	771 A Mental Struggle.....	20
453 The Lottery Ticket.....	20	785 The Haunted Chamber.....	10
475 The Prima Donna's Husband.	20	862 Ugly Barrington.....	10
522 Zig-Zag, the Clown; or, The Steel Gauntlets.....	20	875 Lady Valworth's Diamonds...	20
523 The Consequences of a Duel. A Parisian Romance.....	20	1009 In an Evil Hour, and Other Stories.....	20
648 The Angel of the Bells.....	20	1016 A Modern Circe.....	20
697 The Pretty Jailer. 1st half...	20	1035 The Duchess.....	20
697 The Pretty Jailer. 2d half....	20	1047 Marvel.....	20
699 The Sculptor's Daughter. 1st half.....	20	1103 The Honorable Mrs. Vereker..	20
699 The Sculptor's Daughter. 2d half.....	20	1123 Under-Currents.....	20
782 The Closed Door. 1st half....	20	Alexander Dumas's Works.	
782 The Closed Door. 2d half....	20	55 The Three Guardsmen... ..	20
851 The Cry of Blood. 1st half...	20	75 Twenty Years After.....	20
851 The Cry of Blood. 2d half....	20	259 The Bride of Monte-Cristo. A Sequel to "The Count of Monte-Cristo".....	10
918 The Red Band. 1st half.....	20	262 The Count of Monte-Cristo. Part I.....	30
918 The Red Band. 2d half.....	20	262 The Count of Monte-Cristo. Part II.....	30
942 Cash on Delivery.....	20	717 Beau Tancrede; or, The Mar- riage Verdict.....	20
1076 The Mystery of an Omnibus..	20	1058 Masaniello; or, The Fisherman of Naples.....	20
1080 Bertha's Secret. 1st half.....	20	George Ebers's Works.	
1080 Bertha's Secret. 2d half.....	20	474 Serapis. An Historical Novel	20
1082 The Severed Hand. 1st half..	20	983 Uarda.....	20
1082 The Severed Hand. 2d half..	20	1056 The Bride of the Nile. 1st half	20
1085 The Matapan Affair. 1st half	20	1056 The Bride of the Nile. 2d half	20
1085 The Matapan Affair. 2d half	20	1094 Homo Sum.....	20
1088 The Old Age of Monsieur Le- coq. 1st half.....	20	1097 The Burgomaster's Wife.....	20
1088 The Old Age of Monsieur Le- coq. 2d half.....	20	1101 An Egyptian Princess. Vol. I.	20
"The Duchess's" Works.		1101 An Egyptian Princess. Vol. II.	20
2 Molly Bawn.....	20	1106 The Emperor.....	20
6 Portia.....	20	1112 Only a Word	20
14 Airy Fairy Lilian.....	10	1114 The Sisters.....	20
16 Phyllis.....	20	Maria Edgeworth's Works.	
25 Mrs. Geoffrey. (Large type edition).....	20	708 Ormond.....	20
950 Mrs. Geoffrey.....	10	788 The Absentee. An Irish Story.	20
29 Beauty's Daughters.....	10	Mrs. Annie Edwards's Works.	
30 Faith and Unfaith.....	20	644 A Girton Girl.....	20
118 Loys, Lord Berresford, and Eric Dering.....	10	834 A Ballroom Repentance.....	20
119 Monica, and A Rose Distill'd..	10	835 Vivian the Beauty.....	20
123 Sweet is True Love.....	10	836 A Point of Honor.....	20
129 Rossmoyne.....	10		
134 The Witching Hour, and Other Stories.....	10		

837	A Vagabond Heroine.....	10
838	Ought We to Visit Her?.....	20
839	Leah: A Woman of Fashion..	20
841	Jet: Her Face or Her Fortune?	10
842	A Blue-Stocking.....	10
843	Archie Lovell.....	20
844	Susan Fielding.....	20
845	Philip Earncliffe; or, The Morals of May Fair.....	20
846	Steven Lawrence. 1st half...	20
846	Steven Lawrence. 2d half....	20
850	A Playwright's Daughter.....	10

George Eliot's Works.

3	The Mill on the Floss.....	20
31	Middlemarch. 1st half.....	20
31	Middlemarch. 2d half.....	20
34	Daniel Deronda. 1st half.....	20
34	Daniel Deronda. 2d half.....	20
36	Adam Bede. 1st half.....	20
36	Adam Bede. 2d half.....	20
42	Romola.....	20
693	Felix Holt, the Radical.....	20
707	Silas Marner: The Weaver of Raveloe.....	10
728	Janet's Repentance.....	10
762	Impressions of Theophrastus Such.....	10

B. L. Farjeon's Works.

179	Little Make-Believe.....	10
573	Love's Harvest.....	20
607	Self-Doomed.....	10
616	The Sacred Nugget.....	20
657	Christmas Angel.....	10
907	The Bright Star of Life.....	20
909	The Nine of Hearts.....	20

G. Manville Fenn's Works.

193	The Rosery Folk.....	10
558	Poverty Corner.....	20
587	The Parson o' Dumford.....	20
609	The Dark House.....	10

Octave Feuillet's Works.

66	The Romance of a Poor Young Man.....	10
386	Led Astray; or, "La Petite Comtesse".....	10

Mrs. Forrester's Works.

80	June.....	20
280	Omnia Vanitas. A Tale of So- ciety.....	10
484	Although He Was a Lord, and Other Tales.....	10
715	I Have Lived and Loved.....	20
721	Dolores.....	20
724	My Lord and My Lady.....	20
726	My Hero.....	20
727	Fair Women.....	20
729	Mignon.....	20
732	From Olympus to Hades.....	20
734	Viva.....	20
736	Roy and Viola.....	20
740	Rhona.....	20
744	Diana Carew; or, For a Wom- an's Sake.....	20
883	Once Again.....	20

Jessie Fothergill's Works.

314	Peril.....	20
572	Healey.....	20
935	Borderland.....	20
1099	The Lasses of Leverhouse. ...	20

R. E. Francillon's Works.

135	A Great Heiress: A Fortune in Seven Checks.....	10
319	Face to Face: A Fact in Seven Fables.....	10
360	Ropes of Sand.....	20
656	The Golden Flood. By R. E. Francillon and Wm. Senior..	10
911	Golden Bells.....	20

Emile Gaboriau's Works.

7	File No. 113.....	20
12	Other People's Money.....	20
20	Within an Inch of His Life...	20
26	Monsieur Lecoq. Vol I.....	20
26	Monsieur Lecoq. Vol. II.....	20
33	The Clique of Gold....	20
38	The Widow Lerouge.....	20
43	The Mystery of Orcival.....	20
144	Promises of Marriage.....	10
979	The Count's Secret. Part I...	20
979	The Count's Secret. Part II..	20
1002	Marriage at a Venture.....	20
1015	A Thousand Francs Reward..	20
1045	The 13th Hussars.....	20
1078	The Slaves of Paris.—Black- mail. 1st half.....	20
1078	The Slaves of Paris.—The Champdoce Secret. 2d half..	20
1083	The Little Old Man of the Bat- ignolles.....	10

Charles Gibbon's Works.

64	A Maiden Fair.....	10
317	By Mead and Stream.....	20

James Grant's Works.

566	The Royal Highlanders; or, The Black Watch in Egypt...	20
781	The Secret Dispatch.....	10

Miss Grant's Works.

222	The Sun-Maid.....	20
555	Cara Roma.....	20

Arthur Griffiths's Works.

614	No. 99.....	10
680	Fast and Loose.....	20

H. Rider Haggard's Works.

432	The Witch's Head .	20
753	King Solomon's Mines....	20
910	She: A History of Adventure.	20
941	Jess.....	20
959	Dawn.....	20
989	Allan Quatermain.....	20
1049	A Tale of Three Lions, and On Going Back.....	20
1100	Mr. Meeson's Will.....	20
1105	Maiwa's Revenge.....	10
1140	Colonel Quaritch, V. C..	20
1145	My Fellow Laborer.....	20

Thomas Hardy's Works.

139	The Romantic Adventures of a Milkmaid.....	10
530	A Pair of Blue Eyes.	20

690	Far From the Madding Crowd	20
791	The Mayor of Casterbridge...	20
945	The Trumpet-Major.....	20
957	The Woodlanders.....	20

John B. Harwood's Works.

143	One False, Both Fair.....	20
358	Within the Clasp.....	20

Mary Cecil Hay's Works.

65	Back to the Old Home.....	10
72	Old Myddelton's Money.....	20
196	Hidden Perils.....	20
197	For Her Dear Sake.....	20
224	The Arundel Motto.....	20
281	The Squire's Legacy.....	20
290	Nora's Love Test.....	20
408	Lester's Secret.....	20
678	Dorothy's Venture.....	20
716	Victor and Vanquished.....	20
849	A Wicked Girl.....	20
987	Brenda Yorke.....	20
1026	A Dark Inheritance.....	20

Mrs. Cashel-Hoey's Works.

313	The Lover's Creed.....	20
802	A Stern Chase.....	20

Tighe Hopkins's Works.

509	Nell Haffenden.....	20
714	"Twixt Love and Duty.....	20

Thomas Hughes's Works.

120	Tom Brown's School Days at Rugby.....	20
1139	Tom Brown at Oxford. Vol. I.	20
1139	Tom Brown at Oxford. Vol. II.	20

Fergus W. Hume's Works.

1075	The Mystery of a Hansom Cab.	20
1127	Madam Midas.....	20

Works by the Author of "Judith Wynne."

332	Judith Wynne.....	20
506	Lady Lovelace.....	20

William H. G. Kingston's Works.

117	A Tale of the Shore and Ocean	20
133	Peter the Whaler.....	10
761	Will Weatherhelm.....	20
763	The Midshipman, Marmaduke Merry.....	20

Vernon Lee's Works.

399	Miss Brown.....	20
859	Ottillie: An Eighteenth Century Idyl. By Vernon Lee. The Prince of the 100 Soups. Edit- ed by Vernon Lee.....	20

Charles Lever's Works.

191	Harry Lorrequer.....	20
212	Charles O'Malley, the Irish Dragoon. 1st half.....	20
212	Charles O'Malley, the Irish Dragoon. 2d half.....	20
243	Tom Burke of "Ours." 1st half	20
243	Tom Burke of "Ours." 2d half	20

Mary Linskill's Works.

473	A Lost Son.....	20
620	Between the Heather and the Northern Sea.....	20

Mrs. E. Lynn Linton's Works.

122	Ione Stewart.....	20
817	Stabbed in the Dark.....	10
886	Paston Carew, Millionaire and Miser.....	20
1109	Through the Long Nights. 1st half.....	20
1109	Through the Long Nights. 2d half.....	20

Samuel Lover's Works.

663	Handy Andy.....	20
664	Rory O'More.....	20

Edna Lyall's Works.

738	In the Golden Days.....	20
1147	Knight-Errant.....	20
1149	Donovan: A Modern English- man.....	20

Sir E. Bulwer Lytton's Works.

40	The Last Days of Pompeii.....	20
83	A Strange Story.....	20
90	Ernest Maltravers.....	20
130	The Last of the Barons. 1st half	20
130	The Last of the Barons. 2d half	20
162	Eugene Aram.....	20
164	Leila; or, The Siege of Grenada	10
650	Alice; or, The Mysteries. (A Se- quel to "Ernest Maltravers")	20
720	Paul Clifford.....	20
1144	Rienzi.....	20

George Macdonald's Works.

282	Donal Grant.....	20
325	The Portent.....	10
326	Phantastes. A Faerie Romance for Men and Women.....	10
722	What's Mine's Mine.....	20
1041	Home Again.....	20
1118	The Elect Lady.....	20

Katharine S. Macquoid's Works.

479	Louisa.....	20
914	Joan Wentworth.....	20

E. Marlitt's Works.

652	The Lady with the Rubies....	20
858	Old Ma'm'selle's Secret.....	20
972	Gold Elsie.....	20
999	The Second Wife.....	20
1093	In the Schillingscourt.....	20
1111	In the Counselor's House.....	20
1113	The Bailiff's Maid.....	20
1115	The Countess Gisela.....	20
1130	The Owl-House.....	20
1136	The Princess of the Moor....	20

Florence Marryat's Works.

159	Captain Norton's Diary, and A Moment of Madness.....	10
183	Old Contrairy, and Other Stories.....	10

- 208 The Ghost of Charlotte Cray, and Other Stories..... 10
 276 Under the Lilies and Roses... 10
 444 The Heart of Jane Warner.... 20
 449 Peeress and Player..... 20
 689 The Heir Presumptive..... 20
 825 The Master Passion..... 20
 860 Her Lord and Master..... 20
 861 My Sister the Actress..... 20
 863 "My Own Child."..... 20
 864 "No Intentions."..... 20
 865 Written in Fire..... 20
 866 Miss Harrington's Husband; or, Spiders of Society..... 20
 867 The Girls of Feversham..... 20
 868 Petronel..... 20
 869 The Poison of Asps..... 10
 870 Out of His Reckoning..... 10
 872 With Cupid's Eyes..... 20
 873 A Harvest of Wild Oats..... 20
 877 Facing the Footlights..... 20
 893 Love's Conflict. 1st half..... 20
 893 Love's Conflict. 2d half..... 20
 895 A Star and a Heart..... 10
 897 Ange; or, A Broken Blossom. 20
 899 A Little Stepson..... 10
 901 A Lucky Disappointment..... 10
 903 Phyllida..... 20
 905 The Fair-Haired Alda..... 20
 939 Why Not?..... 20
 993 Fighting the Air..... 20
 998 Open Sesame..... 20
 1004 Mad Dumaresq..... 20
 1013 The Confessions of Gerald Estcourt..... 20
 1022 Driven to Bay..... 20
 1126 Gentleman and Courtier..... 20
- Captain Marryat's Works.**
 88 The Privateersman..... 20
 272 The Little Savage..... 10
 279 Rattlin, the Reefer..... 20
 991 Mr. Midshipman Easy..... 20
- Helen B. Mathers's Works.**
 13 Eyre's Acquittal..... 10
 221 Comin' Thro' the Rye..... 20
 438 Found Out..... 10
 535 Murder or Manslaughter?..... 10
 673 Story of a Sin..... 20
 713 "Cherry Ripe"..... 20
 795 Sam's Sweetheart..... 20
 798 The Fashion of this World.... 10
 799 My Lady Green Sleeves..... 20
- Justin McCarthy's Works.**
 121 Maid of Athens..... 20
 602 Camiola..... 20
 685 England Under Gladstone. 1880—1885..... 20
 747 Our Sensation Novel. Edited by Justin H. McCarthy, M.P.. 10
 779 Doom! An Atlantic Episode.. 10
- George Meredith's Works.**
 350 Diana of the Crossways..... 10
 1146 Rhoda Fleming..... 20
- 1150 The Egoist..... 20**
- Mrs. Alex. McVeigh Miller's Works.**
 267 Laurel Vane; or, The Girls' Conspiracy..... 20
 268 Lady Gay's Pride; or, The Miser's Treasure..... 20
 269 Lancaster's Choice..... 20
 316 Sworn to Silence; or, Aline Rodney's Secret... 20
- Jean Middlemas's Works.**
 155 Lady Muriel's Secret..... 20
 539 Silvermead..... 20
- Alan Muir's Works.**
 172 "Golden Girls"..... 20
 346 Tumbledown Farm..... 10
- Miss Mulock's Works.**
 11 John Halifax, Gentleman. 1st half..... 20
 11 John Halifax, Gentleman. 2d half..... 20
 245 Miss Tommy, and In a House-Boat..... 10
 808 King Arthur. Not a Love Story 20
 1018 Two Marriages..... 20
 1038 Mistress and Maid..... 20
 1053 Young Mrs. Jardine..... 20
- David Christie Murray's Works.**
 58 By the Gate of the Sea..... 10
 195 "The Way of the World"..... 20
 320 A Bit of Human Nature..... 10
 661 Rainbow Gold..... 20
 674 First Person Singular..... 20
 691 Valentine Strange..... 20
 695 Hearts: Queen, Knave, and Deuce..... 20
 698 A Life's Atonement..... 20
 737 Aunt Rachel..... 10
 826 Cynic Fortune..... 20
 898 Bulldog and Butterfly, and Julia and Her Romeo..... 20
 1102 Young Mr. Barter's Repentance..... 10
- Works by the author of "My Ducats and My Daughter."**
 376 The Crime of Christmas Day. 10
 596 My Ducats and My Daughter.. 20
- W. E. Norris's Works.**
 184 Thirlby Hall..... 20
 277 A Man of His Word..... 10
 355 That Terrible Man..... 10
 500 Adrian Vidal..... 20
 824 Her Own Doing..... 10
 848 My Friend Jim..... 20
 871 A Bachelor's Blunder..... 20
 1019 Major and Minor. 1st half.... 20
 1019 Major and Minor. 2d half.... 20
 1084 Chris..... 20
 1141 The Rogue. 1st half..... 20
 1141 The Rogue. 2d half..... 20
- Laurence Oliphant's Works.**
 47 Altiora Peto..... 20
 537 Piccadilly..... 10

Mrs. Oliphant's Works.		1003 Chandos. 1st half.....	20
45	A Little Pilgrim.....	1003 Chandos. 2d half.....	20
177	Salem Chapel.....	1017 Tricotrin. 1st half.....	20
205	The Minister's Wife.....	1017 Tricotrin. 2d half.....	20
221	The Prodigals, and Their Inheritance.....		
		James Payn's Works.	
337	Memoirs and Resolutions of Adam Graeme of Mossgray, including some Chronicles of the Borough of Fendie.....	48	Thicker Than Water..... 20
345	Madam.....	186	The Canon's Ward..... 20
351	The House on the Moor.....	343	The Talk of the Town..... 20
357	John.....	577	In Peril and Privation..... 10
370	Lucy Crofton.....	589	The Luck of the Darrells..... 20
371	Margaret Maitland.....	823	The Heir of the Ages..... 20
377	Magdalen Hepburn: A Story of the Scottish Reformation....		
402	Lilliesleaf; or, Passages in the Life of Mrs. Margaret Maitland of Sunnyside.....	Miss Jane Porter's Works.	
410	Old Lady Mary.....	660	The Scottish Chiefs. 1st half. 20
527	The Days of My Life.....	660	The Scottish Chiefs. 2d half. 20
528	At His Gates.....	696	Thaddeus of Warsaw..... 20
568	The Perpetual Curate.....		
569	Harry Muir.....	Cecil Power's Works.	
603	Agnes. 1st half.....	336	Philistia..... 20
603	Agnes. 2d half.....	611	Babylon..... 20
604	Innocent. 1st half.....		
604	Innocent. 2d half.....	Mrs. Campbell Praed's Works.	
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