WILL SHE?

[All The Year Round.]

"Quite an absurdity, isn't it? and very unpleasant for you and Mr. Horniblow, I'm sure. I said so when I first heard what old Josh Brooke was contemplating. 'Well, Hugo,' I said, "I don't envy the new rector of Ashlegh and his wife, to have the old rector's daughter perpetuated in the parish as village schoolmistress.' Of course it's very awkward, isn't it now?"

Mrs. Fortescue, who was tall, plump, and forcible in figure, manner, and voice, looked into the somewhat insignificant face of the new rector's wife, as she put the last query confidentially.

"Well, you see, Mrs. Fortescue," she answered, unsealing her thin, compressed lips, "as new-comers we are not obliged to take antecedents into consideration. To us, Miss—what is her name? Oh, yes, thank you—Miss Bartlemy need merely be the village schoolmistress, unless we choose to have it otherwise, so that, you see, for us there is no awkwardness at all. But I am really glad to know your feeling about her, for we had heard, no doubt, quite a false report that your son had——"

Mrs. Fortescue let her say no more.

"Ah, indeed, so you heard of that! How things do fly! Oh, yes, indeed, and it was almost true! He was quite fascinated. Poor dear Hugo! Such an eye for beauty as the boy has."

"Boy!" echoed Mrs. Horniblow, "I mean your son, the curate of Flaxton."

"So do I—my only son—my Hugo," replied Mrs. Fortescue; "but he is only a boy where a pretty face is concerned. Fell in love at first sight with Miss Bartlemy. She is very pretty, you know—quite a beauty in fact, and very taking too. Poor Hugo! But then that was in her best days, before it was discovered that her father had lost all his property. The income from Ashlegh, of course, died with him, and he had saved nothing. Fortunately, dear Hugo was not too deeply implicated; he was on the verge, but he had not proposed, and, of course, now it is all over; still, I may confess to you in private, dear Mrs. Horniblow, that I should greatly have preferred the young woman's being located elsewhere."

"Ah, to be sure, I dare say!" replied Mrs Horniblow, and pressed her thin lips together. "And this Mr. Brooke, I suppose, is a relative of the young wom—young person, I suppose."

"No, only her godfather. He was old Bartlemy's pupil—a lad of nineteen when she was born, and he stood godfather to her; but it's the most ridiculous idea his settling her down here. If he wanted to provide for them—she has a paralytic mother, quite helpless and childish, poor thing!—he might have done so elsewhere; but he's most eccentric in his ways—mad you might call him—and if he takes a thing into his head—do it he will. They call him 'Old Josh Brooke' in the neighborhood, not that he is so very old, but so crotchety."

"Well, if he must make her schoolmistress, he need not have made her organist. I have always expected my governess to play, and this salary would have been a great help toward her own; besides which, I play a little myself—not much, certainly, but I used to sometimes in the holidays, when Miss Makin was away, and I suppose this girl plays so well that I couldn't play after her. Yes, the organ business is a nuisance certainly."

"Yes, no doubt very awkward indeed," agreed Mrs. Fortescue, glad to find the rector's wife had a grievance after all as well as herself, and she felt well satisfied with her afternoon's work.

Meanwhile "Old Josh Brooke" is standing in the shady little two-seated porch of Ashlegh school cottage talking to the "young wom—young person," who bends her head and does not smile in answer to her godfather's half anxious, half playful:

"Well, Mary, feeling reconciled yet?"

She looks up at his kindly face; rather a large, plain face, with a bald head, that gives him almost a venerable appearance in spite of his having only just turned forty; but she does not smile, and she speaks gravely, almost sadly.

"I wish I had never consented to stay in Ashlegh, Mr. Brooke," she says.

"But why?" he asks, and his pleasant mouth puts on a vexed expression. "Why should you wish such a thing? Tell me your reasons, Mary."

"I've told you so many times, Mr. Brooke," she says quickly, "but you never will listen or believe me; it's no use repeating them"; and the least glimmer of a smile shone out over her face at the remembrance of his determined incredulity.

"I'm glad that you can still smile, Mary. I was afraid that it was something serious. Come, at least tell me your new reasons for being sorry I persuaded you to remain in Ashlegh."

"I've no new reasons," she answers; "and I know I ought not to have any old ones. Dear mother is quite happy; she doesn't miss the rectory now that her room is so like the old one, and that is all your goodness, Mr. Brooke, as well as all the rest; but I can't help feeling sorry that I am here instead of elsewhere."

"Thank you, Miss Mary, for the implied compliment. I am sorry—truth forbids my returning it, for I am very glad your mother and you are so near that I can at least watch over you both a little. You shouldn't begrudge me that little pleasure, to say nothing of my having stood up for you as a deeply-aggrieved infant. Your mother was my first friend long before I was squire at Ashlegh; and I am vain enough to think she would miss me."

"Oh, she would indeed; I think you are the only one she knows now, besides old Margaret and me! And I should miss you, too, Mr. Brooke; I should indeed. You are the only friend we have in the world now. It is only that I know—I can't help feeling—that they——"

"What? Who?" He asks sharply.

"The new people. The rector and his wife will think me incapable. Indeed, I know they do; they have said so. They would rather have a conventional, proper mistress."

"Incapable! Nonsense, child, you are oversensitive. Every one knows how clever you are. Weren't you gold medalist at that—what do you call 'm place! Incapable, indeed! Who has been putting that into your head, Mary?"

"Nobody has put it in, Mr. Brooke," she answers, smiling at his warmth; "it came of itself, but I know what people think."

"Who has said anything?" he asked indignantly.

"No one—at least not to my face. But I can see what they think without being told in so many words. Everybody looks down upon me here because I once was rich and now I'm poor."

"Hear the young woman appraise herself," laughed Mr. Brooke. "And do you think, Miss Bartlemy, that you'd be worth as much to strangers as you are to us here, who know and love you and your mother?"

"Oh, no; I know I shouldn't; but they wouldn't look down upon me—as—as—some do here."

"Some! Who, Mary? Have you—? You haven't been out of the village, I know, since I saw you last. Who has wounded you?"

He speaks angrily, and looks as he speaks, and Mary hastens to try and remove his anger.

"Oh, never mind, please! Pray forget what I have said," she begs earnestly, while her cheeks flush painfully; "I am silly, and—and oversensitive, as you say, and—and I'm not used to my new life yet. I wish I hadn't said anything to you. It was very foolish. I really don't mind—at least, not much."

"Yes, you look as if you didn't mind—not much," he says—almost contemptuously, she thinks. "I think I have never seen you so thoroughly vexed before, Mary. Yes, it is silly to be wounded because a—a puppy like that—I beg your pardon, Mary," he says, checking himself sharply. "Perhaps you like—still like the fellow, I mean; but there, I won't say anything against him. Don't cry, you silly girl; upon my soul! I know what I should like uncommonly."

"Oh! Mr. Brooke," says Mary, obediently drying her eyes, "if it is anything I could do for you——"

"No, no, child; you're the very last person who would give me my own way in that matter," and Mr. Brooke takes the little basket in which he had brought the poor paralyzed mother an offering of fruit and flowers from her daughter's hand. "Good afternoon, dear, and try a little to grow better pleased with your work and your new home here. Your mother is happy; why should not you be so, too?"

There is a world of quiet reproof, and, as she fancies, of reproach also in his voice as he turns rather abruptly to leave her. This reflection brings Mary to her senses at once. How ungrateful she had shown herself for all his kindness!

"Let me at least know what it is you would like," she says, ready to cry again at his reproof, though she feels she had deserved it.

"I should like to collar dear Hugo and horsewhip him," he answers bluntly, looking her full in the face; then turns away and leaves her, and does not once look back as he rides away.

She was a little angry with him now. Why need he remind her that the man who a little while ago was her devoted follower had, since her father's death and the discovery of his insolvency, never once been near her? Mary blushed hotly as she recalled her old friend's words. Yet she knew right well that if she had still been the only child of the rector Mr. Fortescue would probably have declared himself weeks before, and poor Mary felt herself as completely jilted as if they had really come to an understanding and he had broken faith with her.

Mary remembered that Mr. Brooke had never seemed happy in "dear Hugo's" society, but she had never known him angry with her before on his account, and it vexed her strangely. How much she owed him! Were not she and her poor helpless mother indebted to his thoughtful kindness and liberality for house, furniture—including the careful selection of all Mrs. Bartlemy's familiar household gods—and income!

Mary well knew that she could never have earned the eighty pounds it pleased 'Squire Brooke she should call her salary as mistress anywhere else, with so much done to lighten her labor and so little exacted from her in return. Then the sixty pounds he insisted on her taking as organist was quite an unnecessary gift out of his own free will. She would gladly have played the organ and trained the village choir for nothing had he wished her to do so, and she was not blind to the fact that all he wanted was to secure to her mother and herself at least a competency.

She went indoors and gave her mother a bunch of the hot-house grapes he had brought with him, placed the flowers that had covered them in a vase close beside the invalid's chair, and untied the parcel of books Mr. Brooke had selected from his own latest supply.

"How good! how true and unfailingly kind he had been to them!" thought she, and blamed herself again severely for so selfishly considering her own wounded pride when he was trying his best to make up to her for what she had lost.

She read to her mother till the invalid dropped asleep declaring the hero of the tale to be "almost as kind and good as dear Joshua Brooke himself." Mary could not refrain from tears at the unwitting reproach thus conveyed to her, and when she saw Mr. Brooke riding by in the cool of the evening she threw down her work and ran out to stop him.

"I want to speak to you—to tell you something," she cried breathlessly; "do stop a minute—that is, if you have time," she added, blushing at her own confusion and the haste in which she had forgotten her hat.

"What is it, Mary?" he asked, dismounting and looping the reins over the little garden-gate. "More complaints? Are you going to tell me that you cannot possibly be mistress in Ashlegh any longer? I am a poor ignoramus. Till to-day I always thought that pride felt no pain."

"That isn't true," returned Mary, bending her head shame-facedly as she made her confession. "I am proud, and I did feel it, but I should be much more grieved if you—if my mother's one friend were angry with me. Please, Mr. Brooke, please, godfather, forgive me for thinking more of my own trivial, selfish troubles than of your kindness and goodness."

"I don't want you to think of what you're pleased to call my kindness," said he—rather gruffly, she thought—and pulled at Bayard's rein till the horse startled restlessly, and Mary, penitently aware that she was indirectly the cause of the 'Squire's very unusual roughness with his four-footed friend, immediately took the horse's head between her hands and began to caress him.

"I beg your pardon for my silliness," she went on; "I don't know what we should have done if it had not been for you. Oh, please don't be angry; you have quite frightened Bayard, and me, too! I think I can bear everything else patiently if only you will not be angry with me."

"I am not angry with you, silly child; but I'm not very fond of gratitude, and it's quite a misplaced term between us. You oblige me by being mistress of my own school and organist of my own organ in my own church. I think I have a right, as I built both church and school and endowed both, to select a mistress and an organist."

"Oh, yes!" said Mary, who, still afraid of his anger, was ready to agree to anything, "but I am so——"

"You cannot make yourself the fitter for either post by depreciating yourself, Mary," he said, interrupting her; "and remember that even if you succeeded you depreciate my judgment in selecting you. If, as you say, you are really grateful and don't wish me to be downright angry pray say no more about it. You will thank me best by trying to be happy here."

"I will—I will, indeed!" she answered eagerly, and looked up at him with earnest eyes to see if he were growing more like his old self, but a sudden glow of color overspread her face as she met the astonished gaze of the two ladies who a little while before so thoroughly discussed her present and her past.

Mrs. Horniblow bowed distantly to Mr. Brooke, as if she could not be quite sure of his identity in such a place and with such a companion, and he returned her salutation in like manner, while to Mrs. Fortescue's clearly attempted one-sided greeting to himself, while she ignored the young schoolmistress altogether, he paid no attention. The lady repeated her one-sided salute, and Mr. Brooke repeated his significant ignoring of any attempt on her part to greet him as apart from the girl who stood at his side.

But Mary could not so repress her indignation, and as the two ladies disappeared round the corner she exclaimed, with flushed cheeks:

"Now, Mr. Brooke, you see for yourself that it is no imagination on my part. The rector's wife does not consider herself bound by common politeness to salute me—and—and——"

"Comfort yourself with the thought that in such matters you are the better instructed," replied Mr. Brooke, who had been gazing vacantly down the road, and now turned abruptly, looked at Mary earnestly, and she thought inquiringly, then again down the road, twisted his pleasant mouth all awry, and finally, loosing Bayard, leaped into his saddle, waved his hand, lifted his hat, and was gone.

Mary was amazed at this abrupt departure. Never before had her old friend left her in such a fashion, and for a moment youthful and wounded vanity had the uppermost place in her mind.

"Does he mean to slight me too?" she asked herself with an indignant curl of her lip, and looked after him with tears in her eyes. If he forsook them—if he neglected them, they should be lonely indeed.

But the color rushed to her face, and her heart beat fast as her eye followed Mr. Brooke's horse walking leisurely along the grass by the roadside.

Always careful of the beast he rode, he seemed now to be doubly so, assiduously choosing out the softest and greenest track for Bayard's iron shoes. Nor did he abate an iota of his care for his horse, patting his shiny neck, stroking the glossy skin that Mary had so fondled a minute before, when a rather languid voice hailed him in drawling accents from the back of a thin-limbed nag, more suited to a lady than the atletic-looking young parson who bestrode it, still a few paces distant.

"Charming day this, 'Squire."

Not a look did the 'Squire of Ashlegh grant in answer to this remark, which was repeated a little more vigorously.

"Charming day, I say, 'Squire."

Mr. Brooke rode on steadily until he was abreast of the young man, never raising his eyes till they were almost side by side, then with a glance of the most perfect indifference he looked Hugo Fortescue over, calmly turned his gaze before him again, and rode slowly on at the same pace.

"The cut direct, by Jove!" muttered the clergyman, slashing at his guiltless steed, who, having a second previously been ordered to halt, was now peremptorily bidden to "Go on, you brute." Not another word did the young man utter till he asked old Margaret at the school cottage if her mistress was at home.

"'Deed yes, sir, for she never stirs out," replied she, "but the mistress sees no strangers, sir."

"Ah; to be sure—yes; but I fancied I might venture to call, as I saw the 'Squire's horse here just now," said Mr. Fortescue.

"So you did, sir, but Mr. Brooke's a friend of the family."

Margaret put on her most dignified air to accompany this little rebuff, and succeeded in overawing the young clergyman, whom in her heart she was accusing as a base delinquent in regard to her young mistress.

"Will you kindly take my card in to Miss Bartlemy, and say that I—I beg she will grant me a few words with her?"

Margaret received the card not very graciously, and departed.

"The young mistress is obliged, but she sees no strangers," she returned to say.

"Beg her to grant me one moment," he entreated; and as he spoke Mary came from the little sitting-room, stood in Margaret's quickly vacated position, and said quietly, with only a very slight additional color:

"I cannot ask you to come in, Mr. Fortescue; my mother is an invalid, we have only one sitting-room, and we do not receive visitors."

"Nevertheless, Miss Bartlemy, I have just passed Mr. Brooke, who has been calling here."

"Mr. Brooke is our one exception," returned Mary, reddening, though she kept her voice steady; "he is a very old friend."

"Then you do not consider me a friend?" said the young curate in a chagrinned voice. "You have put the past behind you—you discard—you dismiss me?"

"I think, Mr. Fortescue," Mary answered, with a stiff smile on her lip, "that with all due regard to facts, you may be said to have dismissed yourself."

"Oh! Miss Bartlemy," Mr. Fortescue said in a low, impassioned, whispering voice, for he was not sure that Mrs. Bartlemy was too complete a wreck to be able to overhear their conversation, and he suspected that old Margaret might not be devoid of the failing usually laid upon her sex; "oh! Miss Bartlemy, cannot you, who know me so well, who know my dependence upon my mother—my honored, but peculiar mother—you do, you must know how prejudiced she is in some things—how especially prejudiced in favor of a rich marriage for her only son. Surely, oh! surely, you could understand—you could feel for my difficulties; oh! surely——"

"I am not at all sure that I understand you as you wish to be understood, Mr. Fortescue," said Mary. Then, as he again began to protest vehemently, she stopped him with a little eager gesture of her hand, peremptory, too: "Let me speak, Mr. Fortescue. I think I do understand your meaning—at least, what you meant to say just now, or you would not have come at all. You say Mrs. Fortescue is prejudiced in favor of a rich marriage for her only son. As you are that only son, and as I am only a poor schoolmistress, there is no need to go any further into the matter. I should not fulfill your mother's expectations; and, pardon me, if as a concession to my own pride, I tell you that under no circumstances would I condescend to—to——"

She struggled bravely, but she could not finish her sentence; the thoughts more than the words choked her; she grew scarlet, and was obliged to look down to hide the tears of vexation that stood in her eyes.

He thought she was relenting.

"And you will not listen to me?" he asked, in so tragically despairing a voice that its comicality struck her and restored her to calmness.

"No," she answered. "I will not—decidedly not," and, bowing coldly, she retreated into the little sitting-room, leaving her rejected suitor to ride away, only half sorry at this untoward result of his visit to the school cottage.

"After all, she's right," he remarked to himself, giving his horse an angry cut over the ears in spite of this conclusion: "I didn't behave well to her, and though I tried to make up to her by proposing, I'm half glad she has refused me; though she's a very nice girl still, and wonderfully pretty, but there would have been a precious row with the *mater*, and as it is I needn't say a word about it."

Two or three days after, as Mary was watering the geraniums and other plants with which the 'Squire's gardener had filled her little garden, the smart page from the rectory put his face just above the garden gate, and asked if this was the schoolmistress's cottage.

"It is," answered she; "and I am the schoolmistress. Do you wish to be entered on the registers, my little lad?"

This was a gratuitous insult on Mary's part, but she felt angry, and she vented her anger on this poor little fledgling footman, who became respectful directly she snubbed him.

"If you please, 'm, I've brought a note from mistress." And, opening the gate, he took an envelope from his tight little pocket and handed it over with one hand, while with the forefinger of the other he made a feint to cleave his little skull open.

The new rector's wife having so instructed her domestic to make his obeisance to ladies, little Jack Tom, being snubbed, at once concluded that, albeit a schoolmistress, Miss Bartlemy belonged to the class to be saluted.

Mary took the note unwillingly. The same writing had already conveyed sundry peremptory orders as to "needle-work for the rectory," and asked, with a vague foreboding that it would contain something unpleasant, if not insulting:

"Is any answer required, do you know?"

"Mistress didn't say, 'm," replied Buttons; "I can wait till you see 'm."

Mary turned a little away from little Buttons's curious eyes, and opened the letter, read it, and turning sharply round upon the little messenger, said:

"There is no answer," in such a tone as sent him quickly about his business, more than ever persuaded that Miss Bartlemy was "a lady, and no mistake."

And this was what the letter contained. To say what it conveyed would be impossible. "Everything gratuitously insulting and abominable," Mary told herself as she read it again when the boy was gone:

THE RECTORY, ASHLEIGH.

Dear Miss Bartlemy:

My husband agrees with me in thinking it inadvisable that so young a woman as yourself, your mother's condition precluding the possibility of her being considered, a sufficient protection, should receive the visits of single gentlemen. There is great danger of scandal to the school in consequence of Mr. Joshua Brooke's and Mr. Fortescue's visits at your cottage. Mr. Brooke's age by no means warrants your receiving him under your present circumstances, which demand great circumspection. Mr. Fortescue's still less so. I am, yours truly,

JANE HORNIBLOW.

Mary's cheeks reddened with anger as she read Mrs. Horniblow's communication.

"Horrid woman!" was her inward comment, growing hotter and hotter as she realized that even their old friend, Mr. Brooke, was to be forbidden to visit them. And why? Because Mr. and Mrs. Horniblow chose to consider his age on a par with Hugo Fortescue's.

"How supremely ridiculous!" Mary said, and laughed scornfully at the idea. "An old man like that! A man who carried me about as a baby. My godfather, too. Mr. Fortescue, now, is another matter. But his visits are not likely to be repeated, I should fancy. I am sure that his dear mother will see that he keeps clear of the school cottage. But what care I? I snap my fingers at both of them!"

"Who are you snapping your fingers at, my lady?" asked "Old Josh," opening the tabooed garden-gate in all innocence.

"The Rev. Hugo and Mrs. Fortescue and the Rev. Henry Horniblow and lady," answered Mary promptly. "But, Mr. Brooke, go back again, please—don't put your foot inside that gate"; and, with the old familiar freedom of her childhood, she put both hands on his arms and playfully backed him out again, shut the gate, and stood on the inside facing him. "I don't know whether even so much is allowed," she added, holding her head doubtfully on one side.

"Allowed? What do you mean Mary? What new whim is this, you pert child? Have you small-pox in the cottage!"

"Whim, indeed! You may well ask; but you must go elsewhere for an explanation. There are orders from headquarters just arrived that Mr. Joshua Brooke—that's you, isn't it?"

She paused a moment and looked saucily at him.

"I suppose so," said the 'Squire, thinking to himself how pretty Mary looked under this sudden flow of spirits.

"Well, then, orders are issued that Mr. Joshua Brooke and the Rev. Hugo Fortescue are not to be admitted at the school cottage."

"Mary, you are joking, you naughty girl; but whether or no, don't couple me with that pup," he remonstrated.

"I'm not joking at all, Mr. Brooke," Mary replied, with heightened color and angry eyes. "It is a fact. You and his reverence are forbidden to call at the school cottage."

"And, pray, do you forbid it, you imperious one? and if so, why so? I say nothing of that—ahem!—of his reverence. But why do you forbid my calling here, Mary? Has your last interview with that—I humbly beg his pardon—his reverence, anything to do with this new arrangement?" and the 'Squire, on the other side of the gate, looked fierce also.

"Nothing at all. It is not my doing in any way. I certainly might taboo his reverence, but I shouldn't wish to turn away the only friend poor mother and I have."

Mary's lip shook like that of a fretful child about to break forth and weep, but she resolutely repressed the inclination, and when she looked at him her eyes had only a very soft and becoming moisture.

"No, it is not I; I have received orders from the rector, through his wife, to taboo both you and——"

She would have cried had she tried to say another word, and his wide-open eyes bespoke his astonishment at the rector's audacity.

"Mary!" he exclaimed, "you don't mean it—I can't believe it. He—she—they would never venture to——"

To remove his eyes from her half-crying face she took the obnoxious note from her waistband and handed it to him.

"There, that will explain. It's really too good a joke!" And she colored and laughed uneasily, watching his face as he read it. "Now do you believe it?" she said as she saw he had come to the signature.

"I scarcely can," he muttered, in a voice of suppressed passion. "The vulgar donkeys! And he thinks, does he, that because you are schoolmistress in Ashlegh he is not to treat you as a lady! Impertinent idiots! What have you said, Mary? What have you done?"

"Nothing," said Mary, trying to appear indifferent. When she saw her godfather she felt inclined to show herself calm. "I am only an underling, you know. Of course, I must submit—I must obey my orders."

"Of course, you must do nothing of the kind!" cried Joshua Brooke. "Do you think I'm going to be ordered out by such a——"

"But surely, Mr. Brooke, you wouldn't wish to cause a scandal in Ashleigh?" suggested Mary satirically.

"Rubbish!" growled the 'Squire. "I say, Mary, I'm not going to stand here any longer. I want to speak to you. I've something that must be settled to-night, and this twaddle of those folk down there only makes it the more imperative. Let's go in." He led the way, and Mary followed; but at the little porch he stopped. "Let's sit here," he said. "Mary," he went on, when she had seated herself on one side and he on the other, "are you really vexed about this, or are you only amused?"

She bit her lips to keep back the tears, but they would come, so she turned her head away to hide them.

"Do you think a schoolmistress can feel, Mr. Brooke?" she asked ironically. "Of course, I don't care a bit. I thoroughly enjoy the insult; I thoroughly appreciate the delicacy and tact with which the rector's wife has acquitted herself. Of course, I take it as a compliment; I am really only amused."

The bitter tone in which she spoke showed him plainly how much she felt it. Bitterness and irony were foreign to her nature, he well knew, and it grieved him sorely.

"I am as vexed as you can be, Mary," he said; "and more so, for this is all really my fault. I have brought this indignity—this abominable rudeness—upon you through my own folly—my own selfishness."

"Your folly? Your selfishness? Oh, Mr. Brooke!" Mary exclaimed sorrowfully; "don't make fun of me. I know I've been foolish and selfish, but I mean to be wiser. Please don't make fun of me!" And Mary, who had restrained her feelings as long as she could, burst into tears and hid her face in her hands.

The 'Squire's face grew still more pained at this double proof of how deeply she had been cut by Mrs. Horniblow's insinuations. He knit his sharply outlined eyebrows till they met, with a doubtful, troubled expression, and finally leaned forward as if to say something consolatory or sympathizing, but did not, and sat up again silent and considering.

Mary, however, soon put an end to her tears. She was too brave and too proud to give way for long; she suddenly uncovered her face and looked at him all smiles, sprinkled only with the remains of her tears.

"Now, if you'll be good I will," she said archly, drying her eyes energetically. "I'm not going to worry myself about Mrs. Horniblow's imaginations any more."

"But what shall you do, Mary?" he asked gravely.

"Do! What about? My orders? Obey them, of course, or I shall be cashiered," Mary replied.

"I think not, Mary; if they did that I should put one of my own men in the school cottage, and leave Mr. Horniblow to pay the next schoolmistress himself and find her lodgings as well. No! I don't think they would be unwise enough to do that; it would cost too much."

"Let's say no more about it," said Mary; "I am getting quite bad tempered over it. Pray, come in to mother and let us forget all about it."

"But you must decide upon some course, Mary," replied the 'Squire.

"I have quite decided," replied Mary. "Of course you mustn't come any more. It's very ridiculous, but it's not my doing"; and her lips quivered.

"Yes; I mustn't come any more," said Mr. Brooke. "But how about the other—that pup?" he asked.

"Mr. Fortescue? Oh, he won't come again," Mary answered decidedly, but coloring and stammering. "I—I—he—I told him that; but there is no use in going over it all again, Mr. Brooke, and it isn't fair to him."

"Oh!" ejaculated the 'Squire, with a sigh of content. "I suppose then—well, Mary, if you don't wish it I won't say a word more about that—that poor young fellow. I can afford to pity him now. And yet, Mary, my child, you would have taken him if you had gone on living at the rectory and he had gone on courting you, eh?" He asked it softly and tenderly.

Mary blushed.

"I don't quite know; I can't be sure. I feel now as if I never could have cared for him. I felt very angry and contemptuous when he came. I was too angry to listen to him patiently."

"But then—in the old days, I mean, Mary—you loved him?" suggested the 'Squire.

"I don't know. No, I think not. I don't think, godfather, that it could have been real love, or I should love him still. And I am quite sure about that," answered Mary, growing very hot over this confession.

"Are you sure, do you think, Mary? Or is it pride that makes you hide your love, or fancy that you don't feel it? You are proud, you know, and a little quick-tempered. You were put out with your old godfather just now remember. If you had still been wealthy Miss Bartlemy how would it have been then, think you?"

Mary bent her head considerably for a few serious moments.

"No," she said, lifting it briskly, as if she had come to a clear and definite conclusion; "I can't find any love for him in my heart at all now. If there ever was any it has left no trace. No; I am sure I never loved Hugo Fortescue. I think I liked him to admire and flatter me; but no, I'm sure I never loved him, and I don't believe he ever really loved me."

"Mary," said the 'Squire, in so hesitating a voice that she looked up at him in surprise, "have you ever wondered that—that—I have never married? Perhaps, though," he added, after a moment's disappointment at her apparent unconcern, "it never occurred to you to think about it?"

"I don't think it ever did," she said simply. "I don't know why it never should have occurred to me. Now you ask me, it seems odd that you haven't married before getting so—I mean before getting as old as you are." She felt that she was treading on dangerous ground, as she saw an unwonted cloud on his face. "Of course, you seem old to me; I have known you so long. I was a baby when you first saw me, Mr. Brooke, you know," she went on, trying to atone for her maladroitness.

"I was only nineteen then, Mary," he said, "and I am only forty now."

"No, oh no!" she agreed eagerly, for she saw there was something unusual in his voice and manner and feared she had unconsciously vexed him. "But then, you see, I am only just twenty-one. It has always seemed to me that you were ever so much older than me. But have I vexed you? Why do you look so troubled? I didn't know you minded being old. People so often call you "Old Josh. Brooke," she said naively.

"Do they? I don't think I mind being thought old, Mary, except, perhaps, when it reminds me of one thing."

He paused, and his usually hearty-sounding voice had so sad and tender an echo in it that Mary was certain he had a sorrowful story to tell her.

"I am quite sure, godfather," she exclaimed, "that you are in love; that you are meaning and talking of some particular, real person, and it is a young girl, now, isn't it? Do tell me! I think you ought to tell me because I guessed it myself. Ever since you came in here and began to talk about why you never married I felt sure you had a story to tell me. Do tell me, please!"

And Mary settled herself in her seat, smoothed her muslin apron, and folded her hands in demure waiting, with great interest in her attentive eyes, but a little curl of pleased amusement on her sweet lips.

"A story, Mary?" he repeated, smiling at her. "Yes, I have, indeed; but I am 'so old,' you know, Mary, and you—you are 'so young' that I am almost ashamed, almost afraid, to tell you. It is the 'old, old story,' Mary."

He spoke so hesitatingly, so timidly and sadly, that she tried at once to reassure him.

"Never mind," she said, "I like the old ones best, like the old songs. Go on; please tell me."

"You will laugh at me, Mary. You think me old, yet my heart is green still; and I love a girl nineteen years younger than myself."

He stopped abruptly, and she counted up rapidly on her fingers:

"Forty — nineteen. Then she is twenty-one—just my own age. Oh, I shall love her dearly, I am sure, Mr. Brooke, for I love you so. Do tell me her name and all about her! When shall I see her?"

He hesitated, looking into her eager, unconscious face, the color rising to his own and fading again. Then in a low, earnest voice, he said:

"Her name is—Mary Bartlemy."

Experts in Handwriting.

[London Society.]

I showed a letter one day to a lady who was thought to be a great authority on such matters. She loaded the handwriting with every species of abuse. It was the writing of a bad-tempered man, of a stupid man, of an ignorant man; there could be no relieving feature whatever in such handwriting as that. "And now, Madam," I said, "will you look at the signature." It was the signature of Macaulay. So, if you wish to obtain an opinion worth having respecting the ownership of handwriting, it is far best for you to obtain a skilled opinion. You are not obliged to believe the expert any more than if you are upon a jury, and it becomes peculiarly difficult to believe when two experts are swearing hard against one another. Nevertheless, if the opinion of an expert will not help you, there is no opinion on which you can safely go. A very remarkable case of identification of handwriting came to my knowledge some time ago. A gentleman had offered a very large sum of money for the discovery of a marriage register, the production of which was highly necessary in a heavy litigation. A clergyman from the country wrote to say that the missing register had turned up in the vestry-box of his own parish. A solicitor and a well-known expert were sent down to examine the document. The clergyman showed them the marriage register, and after a protracted examination they all went to lunch. Then an opinion decidedly unfavorable to the genuineness of the document was delivered by the expert in handwriting. It was quite modern handwriting, and did not possess the comparative antiquity claimed for it. "Then, how in the world did it get there?" asked the vicar. The expert had diligently examined the vicar's handwriting in his own note and said quietly: "Why you forged it yourself." The unhappy parson, being threatened with highly penal consequences, fled the country. I am sorry to say anything against the cloth, but many of my readers will recognize this as a true story. The moral is that if it is really necessary to trace and expose an anonymous communication you had better use the best available means for doing so.

DYSPEPSIA

BROWN'S IRON BITTERS — THE BEST TONIC

QUALITY P PURITY NOT QUANTITY. Trade Mark. On Every Bottle.

PHYSICIANS AND DRUGGISTS RECOMMEND IT.

Quickly and completely Cures Dyspepsia in all its forms, Heartburn, Belching, Tasting the Food, etc. It enriches and purifies the blood, stimulates the appetite, and aids the assimilation of food. REV. J. T. ROSSITER, the honored pastor of the First Reformed Church, Baltimore, Md., says: "Having used Brown's Iron Bitters for Dyspepsia and Indigestion I take great pleasure in recommending it highly. Also consider it a splendid tonic and invigorator, and very strengthening."

HON. JOSEPH C. SUIT, Judge of Circuit Court, Clinton Co., Ind., says: "I bear most cheerful testimony to the efficacy of Brown's Iron Bitters for Dyspepsia, and as a tonic."

Genuine has above Trade Mark and crossed red lines on wrapper. Take no other. Made only by BROWN CHEMICAL CO., BALTIMORE, MD.

CLEANING, DYEING, &c.

RICHMOND STEAM DYEING,- SCOURING,- AND CARPET-CLEANING-WORKS, 808 north Fifth street, Richmond, Va. Special attention paid to cleaning, dyeing, and repairing GENTLEMEN'S CLOTHES. CARPETS taken up, cleaned, and relaid. Mrs. A. J. PYLE, Proprietress. oc 1-F,Su&W3m

UNDERTAKERS.

JOSEPH W. LAUBE, CORNER FIRST AND BROAD STREETS, RICHMOND, VA., FURNISHING UNDERTAKER. Everything first-class in this line and at reasonable rates. Telegraphic orders given prompt attention. Telephone No. 371. ja 30-eod

L. W. BILLUPS & SON, FURNISHING UNDERTAKERS, 1506 EAST MAIN STREET (under St. Charles Hotel). BURIAL-CASES, SHROUDS, and FUNERAL CONVEYANCES furnished at all hours. Telegraph orders attended to day or night. Telephone No. 448. mh 14-Su,W&F

L. T. CHRISTIAN, FURNISHING UNDERTAKER, No. 1215 EAST BROAD STREET, RICHMOND, VA. Telephones {Office, No. 68. Residence, No. 138. Orders promptly executed. Prices moderate. ja 29-eod

GUINN'S PIONEER BLOOD RENEWER

Cures All Blood and Skin Diseases, Rheumatism, Scrofula, Old Sores.

A PERFECT SPRING MEDICINE.

A SUPERB FLESH-PRODUCER AND TONIC.

HEAR THE WITNESSES!

TEN TO TWENTY POUNDS.

RELIEF!

Forty Years a Sufferer from CATARRH.

WONDERFUL TO RELATE.

"FOR FORTY YEARS I have been a victim to CATARRH—three fourths of the time a sufferer from EXCRUCIATING PAINS ACROSS MY FOREHEAD AND MY NOSTRILS. The discharges were so offensive that I hesitate to mention it, except for the good it may do some other sufferer. I have spent a young fortune from my earnings during my forty years of suffering to obtain relief from the doctors. I have tried patent medicines—every one I could learn of—from the four corners of the earth, with no relief. And AT LAST (fifty-seven years of age) have met with a remedy that has cured me entirely—made me a new man. I weighed 128 pounds and now weigh 146. I used thirteen bottles of the medicine, and the only regret I have is that, being in the humble walks of life, I may not have influence to prevail on all Catarrh sufferers to use what has cured me—

Guinn's Pioneer Blood Renewer.

"HENRY CHEVES, No. 267 Second street, Macon, Ga."

"Mr. Henry Cheves, the writer of the above, formerly of Crawford county, now of Macon, Ga., merits the confidence of all interested in Catarrh.

"W. A. HUFF, Ex-Mayor of Macon."

A Man of Sixty-Eight Winters.

I am sixty-eight years of age, and regard GUINN'S PIONEER a fine tonic for the feeble. By its use my strength has been restored and my weight increased ten pounds. A. F. G. CAMPBELL, Cotton-Gin Maker.

MACON, GA., February 18, 1886.

A Crippled Confederate Says:

I only weighed 128 pounds when I commenced GUINN'S PIONEER, and now weigh 147 pounds. I could hardly walk with a stick to support me, and can now walk long distances without help. Its benefit to me is beyond calculation. D. RUFUS BOSTICK, Cotton-Buyer, Macon, Ga.

Mr. A. H. Bramblett, Hardware Merchant of Forsyth, Ga., Writes:

It acted like a charm on my general health. I consider it a fine tonic. I weigh more than I have for twenty-five years. Respectfully, A. H. BRAMBLETT.

Mr. W. F. Jones, Macon, Says:

My wife has regained her strength and increased ten pounds in weight. We recommend GUINN'S PIONEER as the best tonic. W. F. JONES.

Dr. G. W. Delbridge, of Atlanta, Ga., Writes of Guinn's Pioneer:

GUINN'S PIONEER BLOOD RENEWER has been used for years with unprecedented success. It is entirely vegetable and does the system no harm. It improves the appetite, digestion, and blood-making, stimulating, invigorating, and toning up all the functions and tissues of the system, and thus becomes the great blood-renewer and health-restorer.

Dr. Moore Often Prescribes It With Satisfactory Results.

Macon Medicine Company: I take pleasure in giving my opinion in regard to the BLOOD PURIFIER prepared by you. I have prescribed it often in obstinate skin diseases, especially of Syphilitic origin, and can say that its use has proved entirely satisfactory. JOHN L. MOORE, M. D., Griffin, Ga.

Wonderful Cures of Blood and Skin Diseases.

Macon Medicine Company: You ask me what I think of GUINN'S PIONEER BLOOD RENEWER as a Blood Medicine. I will state that I have seen some very wonderful cures from the effects of it in skin diseases and blood diseases. It is without a doubt the BEST BLOOD MEDICINE before the country. JAMES A. ROSE, Williamsville, Pike county.

A SUPERB FLESH-PRODUCER AND TONIC.

GUINN'S PIONEER BLOOD RENEWER Cures all Blood and Skin Diseases, Rheumatism, Scrofula, Old Sores. A perfect Spring Medicine.

If not in your market, it will be forwarded on receipt of price. Small bottles, $1; large, $1.75. Essay on Blood and Skin Diseases mailed free.

MACON MEDICINE COMPANY, Macon, Ga.

PRICE PER BOTTLE $1; LARGE SIZE, $1.75.

ESSAY ON BLOOD AND SKIN DISEASES MAILED FREE.

MACON MEDICINE COMPANY, Macon, Ga.

At wholesale by POWERS, TAYLOR & CO., OWENS & MINOR, and BODEKER BROTHERS, Richmond, Va.

At retail by T. ROBERTS BAKER, 919 Main street; FOLK MILLER & CO., 900 Main street; G. W. TURNER, Main and Twenty-second streets; GEORGE W. LATIMER, 800 west Marshall; E. P. REEVE, 602 east Marshall; Dr. J. F. CRANE, corner Williamsburg avenue and Louisiana street. mh 5-eod1y

DENTISTS.

L. M. COWARDIN, M. D., D. D. S., (successor to WOOD & COWARDIN.) W. A. PLEASANTS, D. D. S., ASSISTANT. OFFICE: No. 407 EAST MAIN STREET. [no 26-eod]

DR. W. H. TAYLOR, DENTIST, has removed his office to 110 EAST MAIN STREET. Prices as low as the lowest. [no 24-cod3m]

HENRY C. JONES, D. D. S. ED. P. WRIGHT, D. D. S.

DRS. JONES & WRIGHT, DENTAL OFFICE, 915½ MAIN STREET, EAST. Office hours: 9 A. M. to 6 P. M. [ja 27-eod]

DRS. GEORGE B. & CHARLES L. STEEL, DENTISTS, 723 MAIN STREET, RICHMOND, VA. [ja 9-eod]

JOHN MAHONY, DENTIST, (formerly Wayt and Mahony). C. H. McCOWAN, Assistant. OFFICE: 625 Main street, between Sixth and Seventh, Richmond, Va. Office hours from 8 A. M to 6 P. M. ja 27-eod

CARPETS, CURTAINS, &c.

Carpets, Decorative Paper-Hangings, Upholstery Goods.

SEE OUR STOCK AND PRICES BEFORE YOU BUY.

GEORGE W. ANDERSON & SONS.

se 28

ADVERTISING AGENCY.

NEWSPAPER ADVERTISING.—For a check for twenty dollars we will print a ten-line advertisement in 1,000,000 issues of leading American newspapers and complete the work within ten days. This is at the rate of only one-fifth of a cent a line for 1,000 circulation! The advertisement will appear in but a single issue of any paper, and consequently will be placed before one million different newspaper purchasers—or FIVE MILLION READERS, if it is true, as is sometimes stated, that every newspaper is looked at by five persons on an average. Ten lines will accommodate about seventy-five words. Address, with copy of advertisement and check, or send 30 cents for book of 176 pages. GEORGE P. ROWELL & CO., 10 Spruce street, New York. no 24-d,sw&wtDe27

DRUGS, MEDICINES, &c.

THE RICHMOND HAIR-DYE HAS NO SUPERIOR in this country or in Europe. The reactions are scientific, and produce a Harmless, Beautiful, Instantaneous, and Permanent Color, either RAVEN-BLACK, or BROWN, whenever used according to the simple directions. For sale at the drugstores. oc 1

EMULSION OF COD-LIVER OIL, PREPARED BY PURCELL, LADD & CO. This preparation of COD-LIVER OIL is made of of the purest and best Norwegian oil. It is carefully combined with the Hypophosphites of Lime and Soda, and will be found a most valuable remedy in all diseases of the Lungs and Pulmonary Organs. It is especially recommended in General Debility. It is the surest and most permanent cure for Coughs and Colds. Price, 50c. and $1 per bottle. For sale by all druggists. Take no other as a substitute. oc 14

CONSUMPTION. I have a positive remedy for the above disease; by its use thousands of cases of the worst kind and of long standing have been cured. Indeed, so strong is my faith in its efficacy, that I will send TWO BOTTLES FREE, together with a VALUABLE TREATISE on this disease, to any sufferer. Give Express and P. O. address. DR. T. A. SLOCUM, 181 Pearl St., New York. [no 7-deod6m&w6m]

PENNYROYAL PILLS—"CHICHESTER'S ENGLISH." The original and only genuine. Safe and always reliable. Beware of worthless imitations. Indispensable to Ladies. Ask your druggist for "CHICHESTER'S ENGLISH" and take no other, or inclose 4c. (stamps) to us for particulars in *letter* by return mail. Name paper. CHICHESTER CHEMICAL CO., 2813 Madison Square, Philadelphia, Pa. Sold by Druggists everywhere. Ask for "CHICHESTER'S ENGLISH" PENNYROYAL PILLS. Take no other. se 18-Sa,Su&Tu1y

DRUNKENNESS

or the Liquor Habit Can Be Cured Without the Knowledge of the Patient by Administering Dr. Haines' Golden Specific.

It INSTANTLY destroys all appetite for alcoholic liquors. Can be secretly administered in coffee, tea, or any article of food, even in liquor itself, with NEVER-FAILING results. Thousands of drunkards have been cured who to-day believe they quit drinking of their own free will. Endorsed by everybody but saloon-keepers. For sale by T. ROBERTS BAKER, 919 east Main street, Richmond, Va. no 18-eod15t

DEAFNESS, its causes and a new and successful CURE at your own home, by one who was deaf twenty-eight years. Treated by most of the noted specialists without benefit. Cured himself in three months, and since then hundreds of others. Full particulars sent on application. T. S. PAGE, No. 41 west Thirty-first street, New York city. oc 30-Sa,Tu,Th&w6m

EPILEPSY FITS.

One dear to me, as well as very many others I know of, having been CURED of this terrible disease, I will, for humanity's sake, send the receipt free of all charge to any one addressing Mrs. L. BECKLER, 1384 Vine street, Philadelphia, Pa. se 23-eod3m&w3m

BOOK AND JOB PRINTING NEATLY DONE at the DISPATCH PRINTING-HOUSE