IF.

If you your lips
Would keep from slips,
Five things observe with care:
Of whom you speak,
To whom you speak,
And how, and when, and where.

If you your ears
Would save from jeers,
These things keep meekly hid:
Myself and I,
And mind and my,
And how I do or did.

—*Christian Advocate.*

MISS LIRRIPIP'S LOVERS.

Lydia Lirripip had a pretty face and five thousand pounds a year, not to speak of expectations. Pretty faces are common enough, even in these days of agricultural depression and stagnant trade; but a girl with five thousand a year is a rarity; and a girl with five thousand a year and a pretty face into the bargain is a positive phenomenon, and, as such, cannot fail to be greatly admired by a number of more or less eligible young men with a taste for beauty of the most substantial kind. Even middle-aged bachelors awake from their habitual indifference when, on being introduced to a lovely damsel of two-and-twenty, they are conscious that the possessor of a considerable fortune stands before them; for although money is no doubt the root of all evil, it is a root which most people very willingly undertake the risk of cultivating.

Since Lydia Lirripip was thus beautiful and thus rich, it is not surprising that she had not only admirers—men who dared to wish uncertain things; but lovers, too—men who had the presumption to hope. It is true that Lydia encouraged none of them; for she was quite satisfied to live at home with her father, General Lirripip, in Bruton street, Grosvenor square, and to ride in Rotten Row in the morning, and to drive in the park in the afternoon. But, fortunately, young men do not require encouragement; nay, in certain affairs, the less encouragement they receive, the greater their persistency becomes; and considering that healthily-constituted young women seldom, if ever, give any encouragement to young men, the persistency of these latter in the face of alarming difficulties is a matter on which all of us may heartily congratulate ourselves. Indeed, but for the persistency, who knows whether the world would go round?

It was the height of the London season, and Lydia Lirripip went with her father one evening to a great ball at the Countess of Carnaby's. Everybody was there—that is, of rank and fashion; and ere she had been in the brightly lighted rooms for five minutes Lydia was engaged for all the dances on the programme. Now, to most of her partners she was only engaged for a single waltz or polka; but, for old acquaintance's sake, or for some other reason, she allowed three gentlemen to take two dances each. It was no doubt very indiscreet of her to do so. But in one case at least it was also very good-natured of her, for she permitted old Sir Pertinax Popinjay, who, as every one knew, was far too stiff and gouty to move about properly, to put down his name for the only two sets of lanciers. Sir Pertinax was effusively grateful, and smiled his sweetest upon her as he returned her programme; and Lydia, instead of regretting her kindness, felt thoroughly rewarded by seeing that she was giving pleasure to the gray-haired baronet, who thirty years before had been a noted dandy, but who now struck her as being simply a prosy old fellow whom very few girls would be likely to dance with. Lydia's other favored partners were Mr. Horace Freake, a young artist who had that year, for the first time, exhibited at the Royal Academy, and Mr. Merton Murley, a man who had no profession and no occupation and who, if he had a private income, derived it from a source not generally known even to his friends.

In this world many strange coincidences happen. Two chemists have been known to make exactly the same discovery on the same day; and two astronomers have claimed to catch sight of a new comet at almost the same moment. It is not, therefore, incredible that, while dancing these six dances with her three favored partners, Lydia casually mentioned to each of them that upon the following evening her father was going to take the chair at the annual meeting of the Society for the Encouragement of Cold Water Bathing on the Continent; that she was not going, but would be alone at home; that she wished that girls were able, like men, to amuse themselves, and that she envied her partners their clubs, their theatres, and their social smoking concerts. Nor is it incredible that, having heard this, Sir Pertinax Popinjay, Mr. Horace Freake and Mr. Merton Murley all made up their minds to call upon Miss Lirripip upon the following evening, and to make her certain avowals, which, although they had long meditated them, they now felt impelled to make as soon as possible and without any unnecessary delay. What these avowals were may be guessed; but why the three gentlemen all determined at the same time to make them is a question which cannot be explained, although the fact that Lydia that evening looked even prettier than usual may possibly have been one of the causes of the extraordinary coincidence.

Lydia little dreamed, when in the small hours of the morning she dropped off to sleep, of what was hanging over her. Sir Pertinax had made no sign; Mr. Murley had not been more attentive than had for some time been his wont; and Mr. Freake had been actually more dull and uninteresting than Miss Lirripip had ever seen him. She therefore slept soundly, and was undisturbed by fears of the coming evening and its visitors.

The following day was wet. The general, who had lived for many years in India, and had a liver which caused him to be somewhat irascible, shut himself up in his library and savagely studied the statistics of cold-water bathing, and Lydia, who could not go out, painted in her boudoir.

The Lirripips dined at half-past 5, to enable the general to get to the meeting at half-past 7, and as he had taken no exercise during the day, and had been quite unable to master all the information he required relative to the average of cleanliness upon the continent, Lydia's father was not in the best of tempers.

"Sit up for me," he said; "I shall be in by half-past 11."

These were his last words as, the carriage having been announced, he hurried away from the table, stopping for an instant at Lydia's side to kiss her hastily on the top of the head. And Miss Lirripip was left alone in solitary grandeur, sitting at one end of the dining-room. She did not stay there long, but went to the drawing-room, whither she bade a servant bring two candles, which but dimly lighted the large apartment. Then, taking her seat at the piano, Lydia began to play and to sing alternately.

The drawing-room at Bruton street was like many other London drawing-rooms. It occupied the whole of the first floor of the house, save where in one corner the staircase ascended, and it was therefore L-shaped, the longer arm of the L having three windows looking out into the street, and the shorter arm one window looking out over some mews in the rear. Heavy curtains of tapestry hung between the back and front portions of the room, but were usually looped up, and in the back room was the piano, at which, within the halo of the two candles, Lydia Lirripip played and sang.

She had considerable knowledge of music and a fine voice, and, wrapped up in her occupation, she started when the door of the front room opened, and a servant, who was to her invisible, announced Mr. Horace Freake.

Lydia rose and received her visitor, meantime ordering the gas to be lighted. It was half-past 8. Why had he called at that hour? Why had he not come in the daytime, while she was so dull, rather than just when she was singing? But, upon the whole, she was glad to see Horace, who, no doubt, simply desired to inquire how she was after the dance of the previous evening, and had not been able to do so earlier. As he betrayed, nevertheless, a certain hesitation in his manner, she led the conversation, and asked him whether he had enjoyed Lady Carnaby's ball. He had, he said, pretty well; and then there ensued a pause, during which Horace rather awkwardly took a seat at Lydia's side on an ottoman and gazed at the carpet. Mr. Freake was not altogether stupid, but even wits often become rather dull when they are meditating an immediate proposal; and the situation is so trying to almost every man who finds himself in it, that it amply excuses the exhibition of a little uneasiness and nervousness. Mr. Freake certainly was nervous, but he soon recovered himself.

"Your father is at the meeting, I suppose. Don't you feel it very dull all by yourself here, Miss Lirripip?"

"Oh, no! I have been singing; and all day I have been painting."

"But dull, I mean, without society? I know that I do; and I have much more society, I suspect, than you have. Unless I go out, the evenings, I find, pass very slowly. I cannot get the excitement of work, for, of course, one can't paint by artificial light; and if I try to read, I generally go to sleep over my book."

"I think that you must be difficult to please, Mr. Freake. You have a lovely studio, and you ought always to be able to amuse yourself among such beautiful things as you have in your house."

"No! I don't think that I am difficult to please, Miss Lirripip; for I know exactly what I want. The fact is that a bachelor's existence is not suited for a man of my feelings and sympathies. I live wrapped up in my selfishness, and feel my heart growing colder and colder every day. I have beautiful things in my house, but they don't satisfy me. I want living beauty—something which I may really care for and do for—something which shall make my life complete. And it was to talk to you about this, Miss Lirripip, that I came to see you this evening."

Lydia experienced a curious sensation which she had never felt before.

"You know, I suppose, Miss Lirripip," he continued, "what I mean. You know that since I first saw you, three or four years ago, I have loved you." And Horace took Lydia's unwilling hand. "Can you," he went on, "learn to love me? Will you be my—"

Ratatattatattattat! There was a knock at the front door, and Lydia was greatly relieved.

"Is somebody coming up?" asked Horace, anxiously. "Oh, I do so much want to tell you all. Say you are not in. Send them away. But let me stay. Promise to let me stay."

A voice, evidently Mr. Merton Murley's, was now audible from below, the drawing-room windows being open and the voice being loud.

"It is Mr. Murley," said Lydia. "I expect that he only wants me to give me some message for him to my father. He will not detain me. But if I let you stay, you must not talk any more as you have been talking, Mr. Freake."

At this moment there were footsteps on the staircase; and Horace, without another word, fled incontinently into the back drawing-room, and rapidly drew the curtains behind him, so as to conceal himself from the newcomer, who immediately afterward was announced.

Mr. Murley was not so nervous as Mr. Freake had been upon his first appearance. He shook hands with Lydia in an easy and light-hearted manner, paid her airy compliment, seated himself comfortably opposite her, and, without many preliminaries, revealed the object of his visit.

"I know that your father is out, Miss Lirripip," he said; "and I may as well confess at once that I have deliberately taken advantage of his absence to come and see you upon a subject which nearly concerns my happiness. I should have spoken about it last night, but that I could not command your attention save for a few minutes at a time. Now, however, we are safe from interruption."

"But, Mr. Murley," said Lydia, "it would be so much better if you would call when my father is in."

"Oh, that is not important, my dear Miss Lirripip. It is a subject that may be settled by you alone."

"Please, Mr. Murley, do not tell me about it now," pleaded Lydia. "The windows are open, you know; and there are servants about the house; and—"

Ratatattaattattat!

This time Horace, as well as Lydia, were greatly relieved; but Mr Murley was furious.

"Let me see you to-morrow," he said hastily.

"Yes! no! no!" returned Miss Lirripip, thankful for any opportunity of getting rid of him. "Good-bye, Mr. Murley, good-bye!" And the same servant who showed up Sir Pertinax Popinjay showed down Mr. Merton Murley, who glared at the baronet with a look which spoke volumes.

"My dear Lydia," said Sir Pertinax, as he offered both his hands to Miss Lirripip, "you were really charming last night. I never saw such a perfect sylph in my life, and many people agreed with me. You were the belle of the room. There is no doubt about it."

"I'm sure it is very good of you, Sir Pertinax, to say so," returned Lydia. "But I thought that the countess herself—"

"Oh, the countess? She and you cannot be mentioned together, my dear. Every one said so. And beside, the countess of course is married. She has met her fate. Ha, ha! But you—you are still—my dear Miss Lydia. I may be a fool; but, upon my honor, I have come here this evening with the determined intention of asking you whether you will have me. You know I worship the very ground you stand on." And to Lydia's great consternation the old gentleman, ere she could prevent him, gallantly knelt at her feet and took her hand with the evident intention of pressing it to his lips.

"Do get up, please, Sir Pertinax," said Miss Lirripip, forgetting for a moment that Horace Freake was within hearing, but anxious that the baronet should not make himself unnecessarily ridiculous even to her. "You can talk just as well if you sit down; but really you musn't talk in that way. I don't want to be married; indeed, I don't. You know I like you very much; but I could not possibly marry you."

Sir Pertinax rose with dignity, and looked rather disappointed.

"I had hoped, Lydia, that you liked me well enough for a husband. What you say, however, may not be final, because nothing can alter my regard for you; and perhaps in the future you may think better of me."

"I could not think better of you than I do," returned Miss Lirripip, feelingly; "and you don't know how sorry I am that this has happened. We can never again be the same to each other. I am so sorry."

Sir Pertinax began to feel sorry too, for, up to that evening, he and Lydia had always been like uncle and niece; and, in an uneasy way, he turned the conversation into another channel. But he could not for long carry it on; and in less than a quarter of an hour he said good-bye, like the sensible man he was, in spite of his weakness, and departed.

No sooner had he quitted the room than Horace emerged from his hiding-place. Lydia blushed to remember all that he had overheard; but he did not allude to it.

"Lydia," he continued, almost as if nothing had happened to disturb him, "I love you truly, and with all my heart. Will you, can you, learn to love me, for your love alone will make me completely happy?"

"Do not ask me," replied Lydia, who was once more seated. "You know what I have just gone through. My head is in a whirl."

"But think how happy you can make me, Lydia! You would be everything to me, as indeed you are already, and I would spend all my days in making you happy."

It is unnecessary to chronicle the whole of the further conversation that took place. Suffice it to say, that at last Miss Lirripip discovered not only that she could, but that she actually did love Horace Freake a little; and on the strength of that she promised to marry him.

Horace was in the act of presuming upon this promise by kissing Lydia for the first time, and was enjoying one of the happiest moments of his life, when another one of those furious ratattatats shook the house.

"Another?" said Mr. Freake, with a smile. "I shall go back to my retreat until we know who has arrived; for now I must be on the spot to look after you." And in spite of Lydia's protestations he once more retired to the back drawing-room.

Two minutes afterward the general, very hot and very angry, stamped upstairs and burst into the presence of his daughter. "Everything has gone wrong!" he exclaimed. "They voted me out of the chair; they flew in my face; they decided that the wretched foreigners don't want cold baths." And he pounded with his stick which he had brought up with him, and looked at Lydia as though she were the cause of his discomfiture.

"Well, papa," said Miss Lirripip, soothingly, "all the better. Now you won't have to go to any more of their horrid meetings."

At this juncture Horace, who was troubled with a slight cold, gave forth a stifled and infinitesimally small sneeze.

"Lydia," cried the general, as he threw himself wearily into an armchair, "I'm sure there's a cat in the back drawing-room. Go and turn it out."

And Miss Lirripip, having no alternative, went cautiously behind the heavy curtains, and was there received in her lover's arms.

"You cannot speak to him to-night," she whispered. "He would not listen to you. You see how cross he is. Come again to-morrow."

Horace, therefore, silently took another kiss; and Lydia, having unlocked the little-used door of the back room, chased him with many expressions of animosity down the softly-carpeted staircase, and with a cry of "Shoo, cat!" finally let him out of the front door.

When she returned to the drawing-room General Lirripip gave vent to some angry expressions of hostility toward the entire feline tribe, and when he had thus delivered himself went off to bed.

How the story ended may easily be guessed. When Lydia's father was in a cooler mood Horace found no difficulty in obtaining his consent to the marriage, which took place three months afterward; and to the end of their days neither Sir Pertinax Popinjay nor Mr. Merton Murley had any idea that a third person was present when they proposed to Miss Lirripip in Bruton street, Grosvenor square.