Ladies' STORY Column.

THE STORY OF A SOCIETY GIRL.

TOLD BY HERSELF.

IN these days when one does not have a father confessor—and no woman of sense has a confidante—one of ability finds herself forced occasionally to jot down her impressions. That is my excuse for the existence of this. To begin at the very beginning, I fancy I was born like other people, went through the usual uninteresting babyhood, but was still a little girl when I learned that I was a beauty. This first came to me from my father. My mouth drawn up to its prettiest rosebud shape, a couple of tears in my eyes would make him give me whatever I asked for, and so there came to me the knowledge of the strength that lies in weakness.

Sometimes I doubt if I were born—I think I am the result of transmigration—first an orchid, next a bird of Paradise and, last of all, a blooded horse. I belong to an old family, and my solicitor tells me that I have a great deal of money; but who ever heard of a woman having enough? Mamma very sensibly, trained me to be a coquette. From the time that I could stand I was fully aware of the value of my white skin, my deep, dark eyes, and that attached to the wonderful red hair that made a gorgeous framing for my finely cut face. I was willing to go to bed early, for I had been told of the good of those sleeping hours that come before twelve o'clock; to be bathed and rubbed until I was weary enough to sleep again, because my nurse had said that this would make my form handsome and supple, and my arms and neck the admiration of the world. School was an unknown quantity to me—governesses and that sort of thing came and I endured them, learned of them, and was spoken of by them as the most beautiful girl they had ever seen—but one who was utterly heartless. They little understood that heart was the last thing that would be desirable in my profession, for I made it such.

At eighteen years of age I was brought out: but for three months before that my mother had taught me exactly who among the men were eligible, who were not, what women were to be cultivated, what ones to be civil to and what ones to ignore. I made my first appearance at the Patriarchs' ball, and mamma very wisely had me dressed in the finest of white silk muslin, made in Empire style, with a broad white sash about my waist, a white rose in my hair, and long, white gloves, only partially covering my beautiful arms. As was proper, I accepted the invitations to dance from the elderly men, from whom it was a compliment to receive them, and, as far as possible, I ignored the younger ones. I sought mamma's wing at the end of each dance, and to her delight, the impression left on everybody's mind was that of my being an extremely beautiful, ingenuous, young girl who knew nothing whatever about society. How they erred. I looked at Mrs August Belmont's sapphires and thought that when I was a matron, I would have ones just as handsome. I stared, politely of course, at Mrs Marshall Robert's beautiful pearls, and wondered why they should be wasted on a widow. The next day the newspapers were full of descriptions of the new beauty, and before I knew it, the sweet, childlike look in my face had gained for me the title of 'Baby.'

At that time I was the most complete coquette that talked out an opera, or looked into a man's eyes so that he believed that I adored him, whereas I only calculated exactly to what extent I could count on him for flowers. You think this sounds vulgar, perhaps, about the flowers; but all coquettes are vulgar in that sense. The old novels tell of a time when maidens fair were delighted with the blossom sent by the man who adored them: but it is impossible to imagine anything so stupid. Of what earthly use would a blossom be? One has been effective when taken from a man's buttonhole and stuck in one's bodice, where it would show well against one's neck: but I cannot imagine their being of any other use. When the young men grew to know me, proposals of marriage began to pour in upon me; but I had concluded exactly who I would marry—the rich, and only son of a rich man, who really owned half the ground on which the swell houses were built. The other men did very well to pass away the time with and give me practice.

The first was a clergyman; he thought I was so lovely that I must be more than willing to give my life to the poor and my love to him. He gave me the most exquisite prayer-book in ivory and gold, with my monogram in diamonds upon it. It was very convenient for Lent, because I could make a wonderful picture by kneeling on the church door holding that beautiful book near my lips, so that the gold in my hair and the jewels flashing from it seemed the only things human about me.

My next proposal was from a man. Yes, he *was* a man. He offered me his hand and his heart, and his willingness to make a home for me. I laughed at it. The very idea of me marrying a poor man! No matter that he was a gentleman; no matter that I had a curious feeling in my heart about him—I laughed at him, and then he told me what be thought of me. You see, I had invited it, but still be could n't know that under that laugh was the only real bit of human feeling that had ever come into my life.

Then there were all sorts and conditions of men. A great light in the legal world, an immensely wealthy merchant, and one who would have given me a fine title, made me a duchess, indeed, for my ducats. But I had intended to marry Jack—the richest man I knew. When the season was nearly over, mamma was obliged to bring to our house the only child of her sister—an orphan. She said she would be a good foil for me, and, as she had to keep her, we might as well go out together. My clothes could be made over for her, and the fact of her being always with me, would make Jack think me more delightful, because more difficult to obtain. I am never mean enough to deny another woman's good looks, but Marjory hadn't the least claim to being a beauty, except in her possession of a pair of deep, dark blue eyes that told something, I never could understand what. Once I heard a man say they were sympathetic: but that seemed to me very stupid. On the day of the coaching parade, Marjory and I, with mamma's permission and under the chaperonage of a young matron, were on Jack's coach. I sat on the box-seat, and I looked so well in my yellow crêpe, my hat trimmed with yellow blossoms and with a huge bunch of them laid at my feet, that even the boys on the street called to each other, 'Ain't she a beauty!' I was, I knew it, and I felt that Jack ought to appreciate it more than ever before. As he bade us good-bye that evening, he said to me, 'I am coming to speak to your mother to-morrow.' Most girls would have got excited, or felt they had to tell somebody, but not I.

There was a small sense of triumph about me, for I felt that I had gained my end, and I walked over to Marjory's room just to let her see how well I looked. What a fool I thought her. Sitting there reading a book that had in it a chapter and a hymn and a prayer for every day in the year! She *would* kiss me—a something that I despise, these outward signs of affection, or whatever you may call it—and after that weakness I concluded not to tell her my secret. Jack came the next day, asked for mamma, and was with her for quite a time; and then a message came upstairs, asking that Marjory would come down. I didn't connect the two; but awhile afterward my mother came to me, and for the first time in my life I saw her angry.

Mamma seemed to look exactly as if she had been learning a lesson, one that came home to her. Do you think that shocks of knowledge come to one? It is said they do. Imaginative people talk of 'having the veil suddenly drawn away and seeing the truth,' and really, I suppose from what followed, mamma had been undergoing some revolution of feeling, or, perhaps it would be proper to say, had had a revelation. For my own part it seemed silly. She said: 'What in the world is the matter with you, that with everything in your favour you should let the greatest catch of the season slip through your hands and be captured by an ordinary, poor girl, like your cousin! What does he see in her? What is there lacking in you?' I thought it very rude of her, and I said, 'Mamma, I think you are forgetting yourself.' And, to my astonishment, she answered, 'No, I am not. I am just remembering myself. It has just come to me that I have educated you to be that something without a heart—a perfect society girl—and that I must not blame men if they do not find in you the sympathy for which they call.' Of course, I was disappointed, first at Jack's bad taste, and then at mamma's ridiculous outbreak. Marjory was quietly married the next month, and to-day she, who used to wear my cast-off clothes, who wearied me by talking of the beauty of love and religion, is the acknowledged leader of society.

After her marriage we went abroad. In London and in Paris everybody raved over me. My pictures were eagerly sought for; the gowns I wore were copied; a colour fancied by me became the fashion. And so year after year went by, some spent in this country, some spent on the other side, until one day I had a sharp pain of a curious kind come to me when I heard a flippant boy of nineteen say in a rude slangy fashion: 'Baby is beginning to be a back number.' It was horrible slang, but—but—I thought of the girls who had come out with me. They were married and had little children about them; I thought of my father and mother; they were both dead. Then I thought of myself. All that great fortune had come to me, but I was alone. As I drive in the park of an afternoon, sitting, as only I can sit in my victoria, I see the people look at me and I hear them say: 'That's the famous beauty. That's the woman who has so much money and so much beauty that she might at any time, have married any man she wanted to.'

I see the shabbily dressed girls stare at me and hold on a little tighter to their sweethearts' arms, and once I heard a little woman say: 'John, that may be a beautiful woman but she is not a happy one.' 'She is a selfish one, my dear, and the most beautiful face ceases to be lovely when in the heart there is only thought of itself.'

Is this true? Has my life been a failure? Is there something better than the admiration of the aristocratic set? Is there anything better than luxury and beauty and surroundings that give pleasure to all the senses? There must be, else how can these people be happy? Well, it's too late for me—I can't begin again. I don't know that I want to; but I should have liked to have it decided if those people who talk about love and goodness are right, or whether it is just best to be what I always have been and am still

A SOCIETY GIRL.

ON A TABLECLOTH.

MEISSONIER had become celebrated and was beginning to make money, when be got acquainted with a Parisian grandee, very wealthy, very fond of posing as an art patron, but very penurious. One day Meissonier, breakfasting with the grandee, was struck by the beauty of the texture of the tablecloth. 'One could draw upon it,' he remarked; and, suiting the action to the word, he produced a pencil, and made on the snowy smooth *nappe* a wonderfully able sketch of a man's head. The 'economical swell' had the head carefully cut out of the damask, and hastened to frame and glaze his prize. A few weeks afterwards Meissonier again breakfasted with his patron, and found by the side of his plate at the corner of the table assigned to him a neat little sheaf of crayons and holders, with a penknife and some india-rubber. While the guests at the conclusion of the repast were enjoying their coffee and cigarettes, the host saw with delight 'from the corner of his eye' that Meissonier was hard at work on the tablecloth—this time with a superb little full-length of a mediæval halberdier. The party broke up, the guests departed, and the 'economic swell' rushed back to the *salle à manger* to secure his treasure; but, alas, the painter had for once shown himself as economical as his patron! He had made disastrously good use of the penknife, and one corner of the tablecloth was gone, halberdier and all!

AT HOME WITH THE LADY EDITOR.

MIDGET.—You ought to call within a week or ten days, and leave two of your husband's cards and one of your own. Call on her reception day, if possible, and pay a short visit. If she has not a day, you can simply leave cards. An invitation is a civility, and ought to receive recognition.

WIDOW.—Yes, you must certainly acknowledge the many calls and notes you have received. You are by no means obliged to entertain callers if you do not feel equal to it. Visitors will not expect to see you until after your formal appearance in church. Send cards with 'Thanks for kind enquiries.' You can get them printed at the stationer's, or, if you prefer it, you can write the words above your name on your ordinary printed card.

LOTTIE.—There is nothing at all improper in two ladies 'not very young' going to a concert together. Wear silk dresses with a pretty little *jabot* of cream chiffon lace edged with pink, gold or blue, and dainty little caps made of the same. You can put them on in the ladies' dressing-room if you are going in an open carriage or public omnibus.

E.M.R.—I am sorry you did not see how to crystallize grasses. Take one pound of alum to one quart of water. Put in a vessel back of the stove to dissolve; it must not boil. Put it then in a tall jar, place the bouquet stems up for twenty-four hours in the water. I hope you will let me know if you succeed.

COMME-IL-FAUT.—It is not at all 'the proper thing' to wear a hat or a bonnet at a conversazione of that kind. You are supposed to be sufficiently well acquainted with the rules of good society to know that evening dress is the only correct style. Anything else betrays you as 'a country cousin.'

It has been suggested to me that there are many gentlewomen in New Zealand who, from various causes, are in great need of the opportunity of adding a little to their scanty income. 'If,' said the lady who introduced the subject, 'there could be some central place in each city where all kinds of work could be sent and disposed of at a reasonable figure, it would be a great boon to many deserving women.' Of course, this means paying rent, and paying some one to sell the goods sent in. The seller might well be one of those in need of some light employment. I was thinking over this subject whilst reading a popular English lady's paper, and was much pleased to come across this paragraph:—'An Exchange for Women's Work has just been opened at the Hôtel Anglo-Français, 6 Rue Castiglione. This exchange is under the patronage of many prominent members of the American colony in Paris, and its object is to assist American gentlewomen in reduced circumstances. Any kind of work is received and sold at the price mentioned by the contributor. The names of the ladies who furnish work are never revealed. Orders are received for American pies, cakes and other specialities, and a circulating library is already organised. Each Thursday afternoon there are musical *matinées*, with the assistance of the best artists, unique Turkish embroideries are sold, and pictures and other works of art can also be purchased. This Exchange is a real charity and deserves prosperity.' If afternoon tea at threepence a cup were provided, and a general interest awakened in the movement, something might be done. At all events, the subject has my warmest sympathy, and I earnestly appeal to my warm-hearted lady readers to send me their ideas on the subject, whether the scheme is practical or not.

To turn to another subject, I feel sure that every mother's heart in this colony has felt a pang of deep sympathy for our dear Princess of Wales, who has so suddenly lost her eldest son. He had his faults, as what mother dare say her child has not? But he was her eldest born, and, we are told, the Royal mother was very fond of him. The Prince of Wales also is deeply attached to his children. The moment he fancied (last November) that Prince George did not seem well, he took him at once from Sandringham to London, placing him under Dr. Laking. Unfortunately, his illness proved to be typhoid, which that month seems to have been the prevailing illness amongst the 'upper ten,' even more so than influenza, Lord William Nevill and two sons of Sir Henry Ponsonby suffering from it at the same time. The Princess travelled night and day from the Crimea to reach her second son, accompanied by the Princesses Victoria and Maud. An English writer says:—'The Princess and her daughters were dressed in black, and looked rather tired after their long journey. Dr. Broadbent and Dr. Laking were in attendance at Marlborough House, and were able to give the Princess a satisfactory report of Prince George's condition immediately upon her arrival. Saturday last was the fourteenth day of the fever, and, as a consequence, His Royal Highness was that day not quite so well, there being a slight increase of feverish symptoms, but in the evening these subsided. Saturday, being the twenty-first day, will be an anxious time, and the evening bulletin from Marlborough House will be awaited with impatience. Prince George's bedroom faces St. James's Palace and not the Mall, as stated by some of my contemporaries, and it was at first feared that the music played every morning by the Guards' band at the daily guard mounting would disturb his Royal Highness; but this is not the case, as he likes to hear the music, and it has not therefore been temporarily suspended. Dr. Broadbent being the Senior Physician to St. Mary's Hospital, Paddington, it is not surprising that the same hospital should have the honour of supplying the two nurses, Sister Victoria and Sister Edith, who wait night and day alternately on Prince George. In addition to telegraphing the morning and evening bulletins to the Queen, Dr. Laking has to write every evening a letter to Her Majesty saying how the young Prince is progressing.' As we all know, this Prince has recovered, whilst his eldest brother, the Duke of Clarence and Avondale, has been taken. Before this is in print he will have been buried with the amount of pomp and ceremony befitting his rank and position. And who does not feel intensely sorry for the gentle maiden, whose thoughts were intent upon marriage rather than death; on dainty white wedding garments rather than on sombre funeral raiment? Truly, 'in the midst of life we are in death.'

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