

"What is man?" demanded Jeremy. "Well, let me recommend you to read Haeckel!"

"Never mind man. Tell us more about woman," urged Grantley.

"Oh, Lord! I suppose you're thinking of Sibylla?"

"I own it," murmured Grantley. "You know her so well, you see."

Descending from the heights of scientific generalisation and from the search after that definition of man for which he had been in the end obliged to refer his listeners to another authority, Jeremy lost at the same time his gravity and vehemence. He surprised Courtland by showing himself owner of a humorous and attractive smile.

"You'd rather define man, perhaps, than Sibylla?" suggested Grantley.

"Sibylla's all right, if you know how to manage her."

"Just what old Lady Trederwyn used to say to me about Harriet," Courtland whispered to Grantley.

"But it needs a bit of knowing. She's got the deuce of a temper—old Mumples knows that. Well, Mumples has got a temper, too. They used to have awful rows—do still now and then. Sibylla used to fly out at Mumples, then Mumples sat on Sibylla, and then, when it was all over, they'd generally have a new and independent row about which had been right and which wrong in the old row."

"Not content with a quiet consciousness of rectitude, as a man would be?"

"Consciousness of rectitude? Lord! it wasn't that. That would have been all right. It was just the other way round. They both knew they had tempers, and Mumples is infernally religious, and Sibylla's generous to the point of idiocy in my opinion. So, after a row, when Sibylla had creaked Mumples and told her to go to the devil (so to speak), and Mumples had sent her to bed, or thumped her, or something, you know—"

"Let us not go too deep into family tragedies, Jeremy."

"Why, when it had all quieted down, and the governor and I could hear ourselves talking quietly again—"

"About marriage and that sort of question?"

"They began to have conscience. Each would have it borne in on her that she was wrong. Sibylla generally started it. She'd go weeping to Mumples, taking all her own things and any of mine lying about handy, and laying them at Mumples' feet, and saying she was the wickedest girl alive, and why hadn't Mumples pitched into her a lot more, and that she really loved Mumples better than anything on earth. Then Mumples would weigh in, and call Sibylla the sweetest and meekest lamb on earth, and say that she loved Sibylla more than anything on earth, and that she—Mumples—was the worst-tempered and cruellest and unjustest woman alive, not fit to be near such an angel as Sibylla. Then Sibylla used to say that was rot, and Mumples said it wasn't. And Sibylla declared Mumples only said it to wound her, and Mumples got hurt because Sibylla wouldn't forgive her, when Sibylla, of course, wanted Mumples to forgive her. And after half an hour of that sort of thing, it was as likely as not that they'd have quarrelled worse than ever, and the whole row would begin over again."

Grantley lay back and laughed.

"A bit rough on you to give your things to—er—Mumples?" suggested Courtland.

"Just like Sibylla—just like any woman, I expect," opined Jeremy, but with a more resigned and better-tempered air. His reminiscences had evidently amused himself as well as his listeners.

"Wouldn't it have been better to have a preceptress of more equable temper?" asked Grantley.

"Oh, there's nothing really wrong with Mumples; we're both awfully fond of her. Besides, she's had such beastly hard luck. Hasn't Sibylla told you about that, Imason?"

"No, nothing."

"Her husband was sent to quod, you know—got twenty years."

"Twenty years! By Jingo!"

"Yes. He tried to murder a man—a man who had swindled him. Mumples says he did it all in a passion; but it seems to have been a cold sort of passion, because he waited twelve hours for him before he knifed him. And at the trial he couldn't even prove the swindling, so he got it pretty hot."

"Is he dead?"

"No, he's alive. He's to get out in about three years. Mumples is waiting for him."

"Poor old woman! Does she go and see him?"

"She used to. She hasn't for years now. I believe he won't have her—I don't know why. The governor was high-sheriff's chaplain at the time, so he got to know Mumples, and took her on. She's been with us ever since, and she can stay as long as she likes."

"What things one comes across!" sighed Tom Courtland.

Grantley had looked grave for a moment, but he smiled again as he said:

"After all, though, you've not told me how to manage Sibylla. I'm not Mumples—I can't thump her. I should be better than Mumples in one way, though. If I did, I should be dead sure to stick to it that I was right."

"You'd stick to it even if you didn't think so?" observed Courtland.

For a moment the remark seemed to vex Grantley, and to sober him. He spent a few seconds evidently reflecting on it.

"Well, I hope not," he said, at last.

"But at any rate I should think so generally."

"Then you could mostly make her think so. But if it wasn't true, you might feel a brute."

"So I might, Jeremy."

"And it mightn't be permanently safe. She sees things uncommonly sharp sometimes. Well, I must be off."

"Going back to Haeckel?"

Jeremy nodded gravely. He was not susceptible to ridicule on the subject of his theories. The two watched him stride away towards Old Mill House with decisive, vigorous steps.

"Run product for a country parsonage, Grantley."

"Oh, he's not a product; he's only an embryo. But I think he's a promising one, and he's richly amusing."

"Yes, and I wonder how you're going to manage Miss Sibylla?"

Grantley laughed easily. "My poor old chap, you can't be expected to take a cheerful view. Poor old Tom! God bless you, old chap! Let's go home to tea."

As they walked by the parsonage a bicycle came whizzing through the open garden-gate. It was propelled by a girl of fifteen or thereabouts—a slim, long-legged child, almost gaunt in her immaturity, and lamentably grown out of her frock. She cried shrill greeting to Grantley, and went off down the street, displaying her skill to whosoever would look by riding with her arms akimbo.

"Another local celebrity," said Grantley. "Dora Hitting, the new parson's daughter. That she should have come to live in the village is a gross personal affront to Jeremy Chiddingfold. He's especially incensed by her lengthy stretch of black stockings, always, as he maintains, with a hole in them."

Courtland laughed inattentively.

"I hope Harriet'll get that wire in good time," he said.

No remark came into Grantley's mind.

unless it were to tell his friend that he was a fool to stand what he did from the woman. But what was the use of that? Tom Courtland knew his own business best. Grantley shrugged his shoulders, but held his peace.

(To be continued.)

Tactful Young Man.

"And so," said the young man, "you say you cannot marry me because I am too young?"

"That is my reason," averred the girl.

"Surely you do not mean for me to understand that you consider yourself too old to marry me?" he murmured, diplomatically.

Looking at it in that light, she concluded she had been hasty.

NOBEL'S
EXPLOSIVES
COMPY LTD
GLASGOW

GELATINE DYNAMITE
BLASTING GELATINE
DETONATORS AND SAFETY FUSE

MANUFACTURED ONLY
IN GREAT BRITAIN

THROUGHOUT THE EMPIRE
"NOBEL-GLASGOW" Brand
IS THE STANDARD OF QUALITY.

Agents:
E. PORTER & Co., AUCKLAND.

JOHN GREY & SONS, Auckland.



MENZIES & CO., Waikato and Thames

TELEPHONE 127.

Grey & Menzies

LIMITED.

Head Office

EDEN CRESCENT, AUCKLAND.

AERATED WATER and
CORDIAL MANUFACTURERS

GOLD MEDAL FOR AERATED WATERS AND CORDIALS.
Auckland Exhibition, 1898-9.