

HELEN OF TROY.

By GUY H. SCHOLEFIELD.

Illustrated by Miss Moor.

THEY sat in the studio—and sitting room combined—of “The Parthenon,” in the comfortable glare of the fire and a huge lamp that hung from the ceiling, made doubly cosy by the sound of the elements without. To their minds, also, there was comfort in the very untidiness of the surroundings, books, stationery, and artists’ paraphernalia strewing the shelves and sideboards in hopeless confusion.

They were sifting out tidbits to their liking in the daily papers and the latest magazines. This was an artist tyro. Some of his pictures, recognisable by all the baldness of his initials, “F. L.,” were frequently exhibited on the walls of the Art Society; others, inscribed “Pleo,” were known only to a narrow circle. The subjects were sentimental, and to disclose his identity as the painter of these would be far indeed from the heart of a young colonial. That was an author tyro, the perpetrator of tales and sketches of pardonable quality and hopeful promise. This and That were friends, the sole inmates of “The Parthenon,” a cottage retreat which afforded immunity from molestation and the pleasure of “two’s company.” The name was emblazoned on the front door—a sullen veto to the frivolous.

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That (looking up suddenly from paper): “I say, Fred.”

This (heaving a deep sigh): “Say away.”

That: “You know I reckon I’m about the only litterateur in this place.”

This (cynically): “Yes? There won’t probably be many on the Macquaries either.”

That: “You are inclined to be decidedly funny. Queer, though, isn’t it? And quite a number of fellows at College gave ‘evidence of literary ability,’ as they say.”

This: “Oh! I don’t know either that it’s so funny. There is plenty of time yet. Heaps of fellows do not develop anything

decided until they are well on in life. Most of the present day authors —”

That: “That’s true of course; but then I’ve been at it for some considerable time now, you must remember.”

This (unwilling to admit): “Something may turn up yet. ‘There’s whips of cherries at Kihikihi.’ Surprises come from the most unexpected quarters. But while we’re on the subject, I believe I’m about the only fellow dabbling in real earnest within a few miles of here.”

That: “Not quite.”

This (indignant): “Who else is there?”

That: “Oh! I don’t care to mention names. Don’t know that I could. Besides, comparisons are odious. Everybody has been an artist in his day. I’ve been known to do it myself—long ago when I was at school. I drew a man and called him Iulus. The fellows said it was very prudent of me to put the name below him.”

(A pause).

This: “By the way, I found rather a pretty little yarn to-day in the Mail. Perhaps it will interest you. It seems to be original.” (Reaches over to chiffonier).

That: “Perhaps. But I wouldn’t suspect you of reading a ‘pretty little yarn,’ if you saw one. Bar, of course, ‘Painters of the Renaissance.’”

This (throws paper across table): “It’s about the middle I think. By ‘Pakeha.’” (Settles down to Art Notes in the Triad).

That (turning over leaves ostentatiously): “Ah, here we are! ‘Helen of Troy,’ by ‘Pakeha.’ Queer mixture to begin with. Don’t fancy Pakeha for a name at all. Too bally common.” (Commences to read aloud with special accent).

This: “Oh, shut up! I’ve read it already.” (Both settle down. Silence for a few minutes).

This (yawning); “Well, how does it