

That Way Madness Lies.

By MARY HERBERT.

Illustrated by H. E. Taylor.



Her friends and relations Mrs. Walton was a painful puzzle. When she chose she could be one of the most charming and fascinating of women; but, unfortunately, she never chose to exercise her charms and fascinations at home.

In the bosom of her family she was the most aggravating woman on the face of the earth. In society she was always the most prominent figure—the stately, tactful hostess, the vivacious, entertaining guest—or an exaggerated Mrs. Malaprop, the laughing-stock of the assembly.

There seemed to be a curious moral twist in her nature. Her principal delight lay in goading to the verge of distraction her unfortunate, long-suffering husband, and she considered that she had achieved the greatest victory of her married life when, unable to bear another word, leaving an untouched breakfast, he stamped out of the house with a profane expression on his lips. Inwardly triumphant she followed him to the garden gate and called after him in the meekest and most submissive of voices: "Will you be back in time to read prayers, darling, or do you think that prayers and 'damnation' don't agree?"

For days after this incident she was in the highest of spirits. She had, for once, put her husband in the wrong, and she made the most of her victory. With an expression of sublime meekness she talked continually of the duty of wifely submission and forgiveness, of how in the days of her maidenhood she never could understand how women put up with cruel or drunken husbands, though

since her marriage she had discovered that a woman could forgive her husband *any mortal thing*, "but," she would add sadly, "though we forgive, we cannot forget. The sting always remains."

For years afterwards, whenever Mr. Walton mutely protested against her aggravating conduct by leaving the room, he was followed by the parting shot, "You needn't hesitate to swear at me, dear; I'm quite used to it."

And yet, in spite of her evil, nagging temper, her extreme selfishness in little things, she could be grandly generous. To anyone in real need she would give freely and lavishly, to anyone in physical pain she would be the tenderest of nurses; but she seemed to lack a finer sense, and to delight in inflicting mental anguish upon those who should have been dearest to her.

At times her spirits would rise to such a height as to be almost uncontrollable. She would then act in a most extraordinary manner, causing excessive amusement to thoughtless and disinterested spectators, and deepest mortification to the members of her own family.

In her most aggravating moods she would be sickly sentimental in speech. While deliberately cutting her husband to the quick, exposing the family grievances, and airing in public the views which she knew to be most repulsive to Mr. Walton, she would annoy him by showering upon him foolish endearing epithets, and appealing to him to confirm her absurd statements.

Poor Mr. Walton! I often wondered how he came to marry Helen Grey. He was twenty years her senior, a studious, thoughtful, retiring, yet thoroughly manly man,