

THE INTERMEDIARY.

By Mrs. Herbert.

Oliver sat on the hearthrug, conscious desolation on his brow, discomfiture in the very angle of the knees that he was drawing up towards his chin. His voice now sank to a chuckle, now rose to a querulous squeak.

"My dear Mimi, it is beyond all bearing! Why should I be—why she should be, for the matter of that—such a born fool as to stand it for the rest of our natural lives, beats me! Oh, that's 'involved,' is it? So's my future, so's my work—involved in simple ruin!"

"How does your poor wife hurt your work? I think she's only too patient and sympathetic."

"Patient? I should think she is! and sympathetic? she's blighting, maddeningly sympathetic! The intelligent interest that woman takes in my work will be the death of me! It begins in the morning over the press cuttings. She reads 'em out. 'Although Mr. Oliver Lambert is not, perhaps a Meredith or a Hardy—' 'Oh, Oliver, dear, what a shame! Never mind, I know how nice your books are.' It goes on after breakfast when I'm thinking what to settle down to. 'Are you going on with your novel this morning? How much have you done? Oh, stuck? what a pity! But I should just try again if I were you, as hard as ever you can.' Then, suppose a telegram or something comes. Sukey, or whatever her name is, isn't allowed to come to me with it and get it over. No; that dear young wife of mine must tiptoe in with it herself, and break it gently to me in whispers, so as not to disturb my work. She's the most fatally considerate woman I know!"

"I rather think you might find the other kind worse, after all. Other geniuses, remember, have been glad of a friendly housekeeper, even, who'll just listen to their immortal works. And Lily is a great deal more than your housekeeper."

"There it is again! Of course she's more. If she were my housekeeper, ours would be an ideal household. But she isn't. She wants to understand, bless her! and looks up at me every other minute to see if she's said something silly! It makes me feel the ungratefulest toad on this earth. I put it to you—can a man do any work worth speaking of while he's being made to feel a permanent toad?"

Mimi laughed heartlessly. "Then you talk of her listening—well she's always ready to do that. Only last week I finished that story I'm doing for Benson—it's to run in the Tatler first—you know the thing I mean! Well, the pains I took to make that stuff utterly horrible nearly did for me! I exhausted every known gruesomeness in the attempt, and invented a few new ones. My only fear was that the Tatler wouldn't stand it. I almost funk'd reading it out to her. Only I knew she'd have to see it some day. Besides, I rather wanted the point of view of the great B. P."

"Well?"

"Well, would you believe it? Lily sat there unblenchingly, with her sweetest smile the whole evening, till I'd finished. Then she said, 'Why it's perfectly charming! It's the prettiest thing you've done yet!'"

"Poor Oliver!"

"Poor, indeed! I was never more mortified in my life. To think of all my good laborious 'creeps' being called 'pretty' by the mildest woman in London!"

"Anyhow, she knows how to care for you. She has the real thing there."

"I know she does! That's the root of the whole mischief. If she could bring herself to feel a little kindly indifference towards me, she'd be adorable. I know I am lovable—I can feel it myself—but it is trying to have a sort of pelican hovering perpetually round one—feed-you-with-her-lifeblood kind of thing, don't you know? It's nauseating. Now you're quite different."

"I am, I assure you!" laughed Mimi.

"Don't scoff. I mean that you never come the pelican over old Trevor. It is hard, you'll admit; there are simply swarms of men at this moment who'd give everything they've got for that sort of thing—'The priceless treasure of a woman's love,' you know. Why, in the name of all bad management, should so much of it be shed on me, of all people? I don't want the priceless treasure of a woman's love! At least, I suppose I do, to some extent. I am not a brute. But, like Saint Augustine's virtuous life, I don't want it yet. I want to write a decent book or two and get done with it. Then I'll be glad enough to settle in the country and keep rabbits and sing, 'We've lived together now for ninety years.' But, you see, I don't happen to have written the books yet!"

"So I rather fancied, Oliver!"

"Oh, it's no good looking arch! It is 'arch,' isn't it, when a pretty woman puts her eyebrows up and looks sideways at one? I know what you're thinking. You think if there were anything special in me it would have come out before this. But that's just where you're wrong. A man doesn't show the stuff that's in him while he's living in a state of permanently affectionate exasperation with his life's companion. I tell you, I

owe it to the world—to literature—to live in the way I like!"

"Really! What a thing it is to be literary!"

"I ought to have taken some woman aside and made her promise not to make love to me or to expect me to make love to her with anything like regularity; not to mention my work till I gave her the lead; not to surround me with an atmosphere of gentle devotion; not to imagine that in her loving approval I should find comfort if all the press were down on my books; not to go beyond a few ladylike swears at reviewers in the way of sympathy; never to ask me 'Getting on nicely, dearest?' Above all never to lay a tender touch upon my head in silent affection as she passes. I know there's a temptation; my head is boyish—pathetic—except at the extreme top; but it must not be done."

"I should like to see the woman who would suit you!"

"I'll describe her for you; I see her in my mind's eye. Her face is not exactly beautiful, but it has expression, and the expression is never exaggerated. I mean, when she's surprised, her eyebrows don't go up to the roots of her hair; when she's cross, they don't meet over her nose. But the mouth's got queer little humorous corners to it, and mouth and eyes together are capable of looking amused without smiling."

"Do show me how!"

"Don't interrupt. This will make 'copy.' She would have a curious kind of detachment from everything round her. She would live in a little world of her own. If you dropped a thought into her world, she would wake and look up and thank you. . . . without asking questions."

"And if you dropped a button outside her world, she wouldn't wake and sew it on," said Mimi. She got up with decision.

Oliver looked at her forlornly.

"I don't want to go away yet," he said. He had charming eyes, and Mimi was softened.

"I wish you would give your wife's attractions half the study you give this imaginary young woman's!" she said.

"Give Lily study!" he cried. "Why that's just what bothers me most of all—her share in the whole thing! Do you think I can't feel for her? It half kills me to think what that poor girl must have to put up with! Imagine it! her whole thoughts given to a morose being who never notices her kind little contrivances for him, or if he does, has hard work not to show how they irritate him. Every other word that she says is received with silence or a fidget or a grunt, or else an answer that even she can tell is forced. No real companionship—what do I know of all the things that interest her?—kettledrums and stair-carpet! She may come in full of bright enthusiasm over some news that excites her—the Browns have another baby, or Miss Thompson is really going to get married at last! That's the expression—get married. Ugh! Well, she comes in and she wants to pour out all this—bless her! What do I do? Do I act like the doting husband in her favourite novels? Do I put my hand under her dimpled chin and look lovingly into the bright face as she tells her story? I do not. I put down my pen and sigh and listen patiently till she has done speaking. Then I say, 'Thank you, dear, for telling me all this. And now may I go on with my work?' Think how chilling to a tender heart!"

"You seem rather proud of being—"

"An unmitigated bounder. I am that certainly," said Oliver, comfortably. "I notice a growing degradation about myself quite painfully. But, after all, I only talk like this to you—"

"Thank you!"

"Because I know you think her worth ten of me any day."

"No, I don't!"

"Eh?"

"I know her to be worth twenty."

"Just so. So I may unburden my heart to you, knowing that I am only making myself more and more of a worm in your eyes every moment and not injuring her at all."

"Not in the least, I assure you. By the way, she is due now."

"What?" Oliver sprang to his feet; "she is coming here?"

"She is. I have asked her to spend the whole evening with me. Trevor's out."

"You invited her to meet Mr. Lambert, I suppose? Like the husbands and wives in society who meet at dinner-parties and talk over old times."

"No, I didn't. Mr. Lambert invited himself. And he must really go now, please; for I hear her voice."

"May I come in?"

A fair-haired girl very prettily dressed, put her head in at the door. Her face beamed with delight when she recognized her husband.

"What luck to find you here!" and she advanced towards him in ecstatic forgetfulness of her hostess.

"Goose," said Mimi to herself; oh, you little goose!"

"I'm just off," said the guilty Oliver. "Good-bye, friends all. Don't hurry back, Lil. Mimi's all alone. Ta-tai!" and he was gone.

CAMPERS

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Those who intend going camping this summer should take with them Dr. Fowler's Extract of Wild Strawberry.

Getting wet, catching cold, drinking water that is not always pure, or eating food that disagrees, may bring on an attack of Colic, Cramps and Diarrhoea.

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"Oh, but, Oliver, I shall hurr—"

"Come back!" cried Mimi, dragging her by main force from the door, where she was kissing her hand to the reluctant Oliver. She came back submissively, and flew to the window, where she kissed her hand, this time to his back, until he had turned the corner.

"Come and sit down on this sofa," said Mimi. "I want to have a good long talk with you."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Honest Advice Free to Men.

The DISPATCH is requested to publish the following: All men who are suffering from overwork, excess or youthful errors, are aware that most medical firms advertising to cure these conditions cannot be relied upon. Mr. Graham, a resident of London, Ont., living at 437 1/2 Richmond St., was for a long time a sufferer from above troubles and after trying in vain many advertised remedies, electric belts, etc., became almost discouraged and hopeless. Finally he confided in an old Clergyman who directed him to an eminent and reliable physician, through whose skillful treatment a speedy and perfect cure was obtained.

Knowing to his own sorrow that so many poor sufferers are being imposed upon by unscrupulous quacks, Mr. Graham considers it his duty to give his fellow-men the benefit of his experience and assist them to a cure by informing anyone who will write to him in strict confidence where to be cured. No attention can be given to those writing out of mere curiosity, but anyone who really needs a cure is advised to address Mr Graham as above.

Slightly Mixed.

"Some years ago when 'bucket shops' were not as well known as they are now, I met a friend from a city where I had formerly lived. Among the items of news which she gave me was: 'Mr. M., whom you used to know, was failed and has lost everything.' I asked how it happened and she replied: 'I don't understand the circumstances; but it was caused by his having something to do with a pail factory.'"

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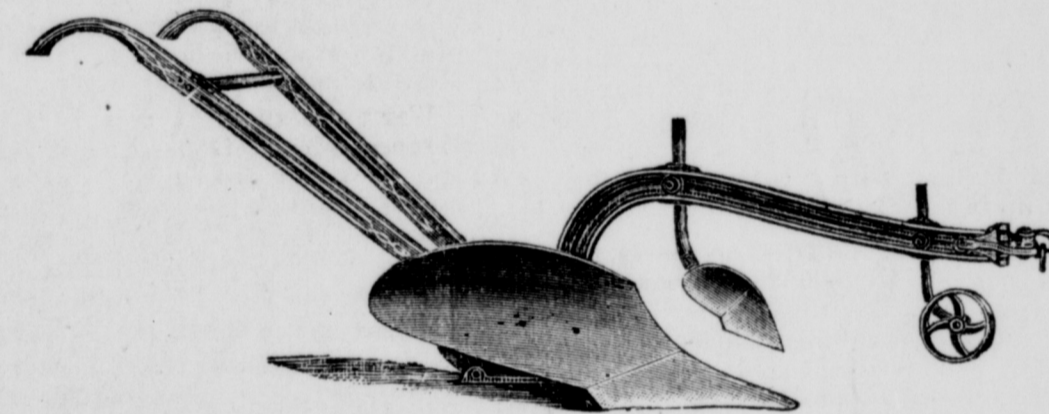
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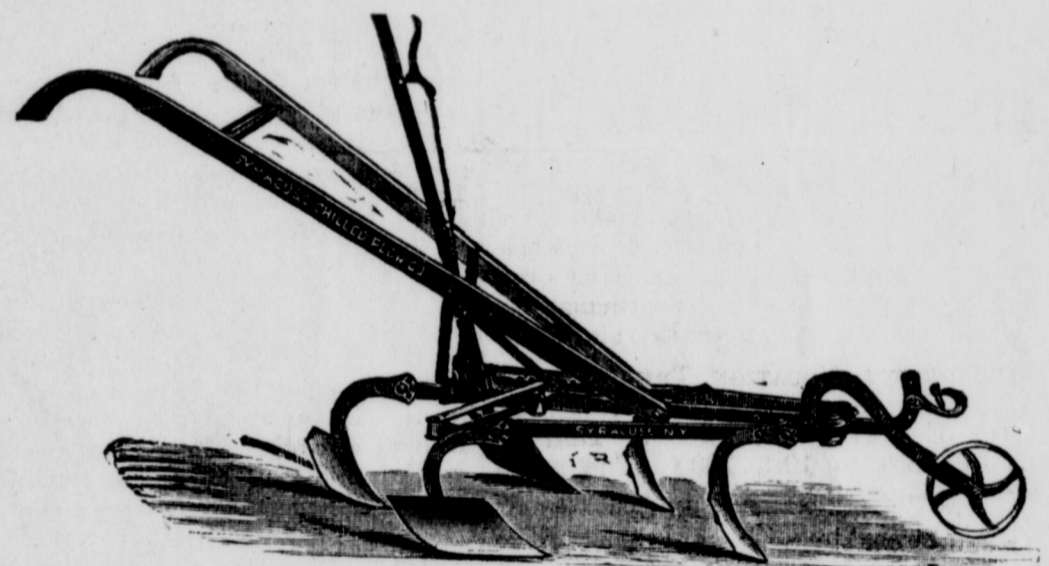
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May 11th, 1899.

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