

## LITERATURE, &amp;c.

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## THE LADY OF THE FAMILY.

BY ISABELLA MUNRO.

'Ah, I am sure she will be the lady of the family!' exclaimed Mrs Roberts, as she sat watching, with all a mother's pride, the gambols of her youngest child, a graceful little fairy of four years old, with long fair ringlets and laughing blue eyes.

The elder girl who sat beside her looked up from the doll's clothes she was making, and cast on her winning little sister a look of the warmest affection. It needed but one glance at her large, dark earnest eyes and serious bearing to see that Amy Roberts was not one ever to seek the title her mother had just bestowed upon the little Sophia.

But not merely once, but many times were these words repeated, until to both the children they possessed all the force of an undoubted fact; and as they emerged from childhood it was with the full belief on the part of both, that Sophia would yet be far above what the rest of the family could pretend to. But this idea lessened not their mutual affection; Amy regarded with the utmost love and devotion her fair, young sister and watched over her, and waited on her as though she had been a superior being; while Sophia, though she unconsciously accepted all this homage as her due, felt for Amy all the love that could fill a sister's heart.

But as years passed on, the thoughts of Sophia began to dwell more and more on her own peculiar destiny. The seeds of pride and vanity which her mother's prophesy had sown in her heart began to take root; and gradually she came to consider herself as one apart and superior to her hard-working father and brother, her industrious mother and humble sister. Yet she loved them all dearly, though never did she blend in idea their future with her own. Nor indeed did those around her; for the wish to enact the lady, aided perhaps by nature, had given a certain gentility, largely mingled with affectation, to her deportment, and they all believed as firmly as herself that Sophia Roberts was born to be the lady of the family.

And in pursuance of this belief, all the advantages that their means could afford—and though humble they were not poor, for Roberts and his son, who were journeymen coachmakers, were in the receipt of good wages—were bestowed on Sophia. She was placed at what they in their ignorance of such matters imagined was a first rate school, and when arrived at the same age at which Amy had been apprenticed to a dressmaker, she was still retained at school in order to fit her for a governess, as their means and position forbade them keeping her at home idle, and that was the only lady-like mode of earning a living with which Mrs Roberts was acquainted. For she had still prudence enough to conceal the hope that filled her own heart, that the beauty and gentility of Sophia would soon get her greatly married, and to make her a real lady at last.

But with time the pernicious plants of pride and vanity grew and strengthened in Sophia's young heart, overshadowing there all that was good and pure. The first proof was in a feeling of shame at her humble relatives, and a desire the world should not know she possessed them. On the Sunday, instead of going to church with her family as she used formerly to do, she now accompanied some of her school-fellows, and afterwards went out walking with them. On one of these occasions she met Amy, who was going to visit an aunt. Though they were on different sides of the road, the young dress-maker could see Sophia's start of surprise on recognising her, and how hastily she turned away her head, drawing her companions' attention to some object in the field beside them.

At once Amy divined the motive that induced her sister to shrink from acknowledging one so humble as herself, and she passed on quickly, and without an attempt to claim her notice; but she was deeply wounded, not through her pride—for she had no thought of equality with her sister—but through her love, that the girl she had so idolised should turn away from her with contempt. Yet that very love was the family one's best apologist, and soon the devoted sister began to reason within herself that Sophia was young and beautiful and quite a lady, and that she might easily be excused for wishing to conceal her relationship with one so different to herself; and ere Sophia had returned home that evening, Amy had in her heart fully forgiven her, and was as ready as ever she had been to devote herself to her sister's happiness and welfare; but she resolved never to force herself upon her sister, or give her an opportunity of disowning her.

At length Sophia's education was finished, and the Roberts' next anxiety was to procure her a situation, and, more fortunate than many others, one was soon obtained through the good offices of her father's employer. They were all delighted; Sophia at the prospect of an introduction into genteel life, Mrs Roberts at the idea that there was an unmarried brother residing with the Lawsons, and Amy, at the thought that her sister's prospects were so bright; and with that pleasure the simple-minded girl prepared her clothes, and added to her store every little article of finery she herself possessed.

Sometime after Sophia's departure, her father was severely injured by a fall, which but for the interposition of one of his fellow

workmen, might have caused his death. He was long ill, and the young man who had saved his life was his frequent visitor, but soon, as was evident to all, less for the sake of seeing Roberts than of looking on the sweet face of his daughter, for Amy had grown up as beautiful a girl as any eye need wish to rest on. It is true she had not the brilliant complexion and sunny loveliness of her sister; but her large dark thoughtful eyes and placid brow were more interesting, and her sweet smile and gentle unpretending manner rendered her more loveable. And Charles Evans was just the person to win the heart of a girl like Amy Roberts; he was so quiet, plain, so sincere in manner, so apparently well-disposed and kind-hearted, that ere long Amy learned to love him as truly and devotedly as her sister.

While matters were in this state, and Evans, though not yet a declared lover, was daily showing himself more and attached to Amy, and daily gaining a yet warmer interest in her heart, intelligence arrived that Sophia was about returning home. She and her employers were, in truth, mutually pleased to part; they having discovered that she had neither education nor talent for teaching, she, that her first essay in governessship had grievously disappointed her. For she had found herself condemned to a dullness and monotony of which she had formed no conceptions, had been introduced to nobody, and regarded as nobody, while the unmarried brother had scarce seemed conscious of her existence. These mortifications she believed consequent on her humble birth having transpired through her father's master—a circumstance she resolved to guard against in future.

Though Amy was sorry Sophia's situation should have been so unsuitable—for that was the only reason Sophia gave for her return—yet she was delighted at the thought of seeing her sister from whom she had been separated for the first time, and she could talk to Evans of nothing but Sophia.

'You will be delighted with her,' she said; 'she is so pretty and so good and so genteel, you would never take her for one of us; she is quite the lady of the family.'

'She is so perfect that I shall be afraid of her,' observed Evans, laughing.

'Indeed you need not,' replied Amy, earnestly. 'Sophia is a girl much more likely to gain than fear.'

'My love is already given,' rejoined Evans pointedly; 'therefore,' he added, with a smile, 'I think I shall have to feel fear.'

And some little degree of fear the unpractised young man really did feel on his first introduction to one he was led to believe so very superior. But it disappeared under the very favorable reception she gave him, and soon he began to look at her doll-like beauty with pleasure, and to regard the airs and affectation that would have disgusted a more worldly man, as proofs that she really was the lady her sister had described her.

Evening after evening, as long had been his wont, Evans still found himself at Mrs Roberts's. But Amy soon perceived that she was no longer drawn thither by affection for herself, but that every word, and look thought were devoted to her sister, who received all with the greatest complacency.

Amy sat looking on in silence, but with a sorrowful heart, yet she cast no blame on either; for Sophia she knew was ignorant that Evans had ever been her lover, her uncertain position with regard to him having prevented her mentioning the subject in her letters, and it was but natural that one so beautiful, so graceful, so highly educated, and so lady-like, should fascinate Evans. She could not hope, so she told herself, to rival one in every way so much her superior, and it was only what she ought to have anticipated. Yet she wept not the less for the fading of her sunny dreams which had come to brighten her tranquil and hitherto uneventful existence.

But Amy did not visit on her sister the sorrow she involuntarily caused her; on the contrary she waited on her and studied her every wish as untiringly as she had ever done, and often, after sitting for a whole evening unnoticed beside Sophia and Evans, she would work far into the night at some article of dress for her sister, regardless that the whole day long she had wrought at her laborious trade.

At length Sophia obtained another situation; and as this time she had taken precautions that her family should not be known, she was in high spirits at the idea that her ladyhood would at once be recognised. Evans was distressed at the intelligence, and at once proposed to her, but she rejected him with disdain.

'How could that vulgar fellow think that I would marry him!' she exclaimed with indignation.

'Probably because you encouraged him,' said Amy, quietly.

'Encouraged him! I allowed him the honor of being attentive to me, but that is no excuse for his presumption,' replied Sophia, who had greatly enjoyed receiving for the first time in her life the admiration she considered her due.

'Then if you did not mean to marry him, I think it is a pity you took him from Amy,' said Mrs Roberts, with as much anger as her love for Sophia permitted her to feel.

'What! was he your lover, Amy?' said Sophia, quickly; 'I am sorry I took him away, for he would not have been a bad match for you.'

'Do not regret it,' said Amy, striving to speak calmly, though her lips quivered with emotion, 'do not regret it. It was better I should discover before too late how unstable was his affection for me.'

But while Amy spoke thus heroically, and

in a measure felt as she spoke, there was a pang in her heart that her happiness should have been destroyed for nought, and not only hers, but that of another who was still dearer to her than he deserved to be.

Sophia's second situation proved no more suitable than the first, and soon she returned from it to seek another—another and another, with the same ill success, till her parents were almost in despair, though as yet they knew not the truth, that she was wholly unfitted for the path on which she had entered. Amy was the only one who still hoped. Surely, she thought, her sister's merits must at last be recognised, and she would be repaid for all her disappointments; and, in the meantime to make them as little felt as might be, by her young sister, was the great aim of the affectionate girl.

But after a time Sophia's want of employment began to be felt by the Roberts's in another point. Their son was married, and his wages of course went to the support of his own family, so that the only means of the Roberts's were derived from their father's labor, and Amy's gains by her trade, in which she was well employed, and at which she worked very hard. It needed to devise some means of increasing their income, and as their house was sufficiently large and well furnished, Mrs Roberts resolved on letting lodgings.

The house was accordingly put in order; a card announcing the fact placed in the window; and Sophia, as lady of the family, deputed to show the rooms. But she was singularly unfortunate; person after person came and went away, but no one took them, each and all considering that if the rest of the family resembled her, there would be little comfort in the house. At length by some chance, Mrs Roberts opened the door and showed the rooms herself, and they were taken, and by the sort of lodger best calculated to please his landlady, a gentlemanly young man, who was, as he told her, a clerk in one of the banks. This, she thought, was an excellent chance for getting Sophia suitably married, for she was so pretty she would be sure to attract his notice, and so ladylike she could not fail to please him.

But week after week passed, and Mr Blewett never appeared to take the slightest notice of Sophia, though she was generally at home to open the door to him, excepting to thank her and speak a few polite words to her—for he thought her both pretty and modest, as was proved by her leaving it entirely to her mother, to wait upon him—never suspecting that she would have considered such an employment as quite beneath her.

Blewett had been some months their inmate, and was beginning to feel a pleasure in seeing Sophia's face smiling within the door when it was opened, to gossip a few minutes with her in the passage—for his plain quiet manner advantageously subdued her affectation—and to dream of a cottage home, with a fair young face to smile upon him, and a fresh, innocent heart, untainted by vanity, unshadowed by worldly thoughts, to love him, with one to whom his little income would be wealth, and who, if misfortune came, would bear the storm heroically, and without murmuring would aid him to repair its ravages.

With such dreams in his heart, in the warmth of an enthusiastic imagination, they were sometimes poured out in verse; and one morning recollecting that he had heedlessly left them on the table the evening before, he hastily ran down stairs to secure them ere they could have met the eye of Mrs Roberts. Sophia, by a rare act of condescension was sweeping the passage; but when she heard Blewett's step on the stairs, she hastily hid the brush behind her, and colored violently with shame at her employment, though she affected to look unconcerned, as though she had been doing nothing.

When Blewett entered his sitting-room, a smile was on his lips—but it was one of derision. In a moment he perceived how full of pride and silly vanity was the heart he had believed so guileless; how completely ideal was the unworshipful divinity he was beginning to worship, and contempt took the place of admiration for the girl who, could blush to be detected in the performance of the slightest act of housewifery. A flash crimsoned his cheek as his eye fell on the lines wherein he had enlarded his sweet humility and modest worth; and, indignant at his own folly, he tore the paper asunder. This was a type of his growing love for Sophia—that unfortunate brush had swept it away for ever; for, though by judicious conduct his esteem might have been regained, Sophia—who had some idea of what had occasioned the sudden coldness of his manner—thenceforth eschewed more carefully than ever all occupation which she considered unsuited to the lady of the family.

One day Blewett was sitting writing when some one entered the room; but supposing it to be Mrs Roberts with his dinner, he continued his employment, until a strange but sweet voice said—

'A letter for you, sir.'

He looked up, and started to see a gentle looking girl, with soft dark eyes and pleasing features. Who could she be he marvelled greatly, and paid more attention than he had been wont to do to a light step that at a late hour every night cautiously ascended the stairs, and at length he remarked the latter circumstance to his landlady.

'It is my daughter, sir; she always sits up until then at her work,' was the reply.

'Indeed! I had no idea Miss Sophia was so industrious,' said Blewett, with self-reproach at having done her some injustice.

'Oh, no! it is my other daughter, Amy,

said Mrs Roberts; 'she is a dressmaker, and a very industrious girl she is; for ever since her sister has been out of a situation she has worked early and late, so that her father might not feel the difference and so be discontented with Sophy. But she is not to be compared for beauty or gentility to Sophia, who is quite the lady of the family. Don't you think so, sir?'

Blewett muttered out some incoherent reply. It was the very circumstance of her being the lady of the family that had led to his disenchantment, and was, as he suspected, making her a vain and profitless member of society.

Sophia was as successful in obtaining situations as she was unfortunate in losing them; and again she obtained employment as a teacher in a school. But this position was little suited either to her taste or feelings. She considered looking after the pupils' wardrobes as unworthy of a lady, and deferring to her principal's better judgment derogatory to her dignity. There was only one of her duties which afforded her pleasure, and that was when, as was frequently the case, she was required to be present when the young ladies took their drawing lesson; for she soon perceived that her beauty had attracted the artistic eye of the young drawing master. Under such circumstances it was easy to form an acquaintance; and in a short time Frank Weddale became the devoted lover of Sophia, who had spared no pains to win him—this time not from vanity alone, but because her own heart was touched.

When Sophia found herself the betrothed of the young artist she was both proud and happy; her indignation at the presumption of Evans and the coldness of Blewett were alike forgotten, and she began to dream, as most dream in their lives, of a happy future with one they love. But even in these bright visions she forgot not that she was the lady of her family, and many were the imaginary scenes in which she figured to advantage among her early friends; and in these ideal triumphs even her unassuming sister was not spared; so utterly does indulged vanity deaden the heart to all pure and generous feelings. Yet with all her faults she sincerely loved Weddale, and for the sake of remaining near him, bore with tolerable patience, the disagreeables of her position. But while she listened to his account of the exertions he was making to hasten the period of their union—how he was endeavoring to improve himself in his profession, painting a picture, and seeking sitters for portraits—the vain thought was in her heart, 'all this will make me quite a lady.'

The period agreed upon for their marriage was yet distant, when Weddale, on entering the room one day, found Sophia in a high state of indignation, and weeping tears of anger at what she at least regarded as some tyrannical act of her superior.

'I think it would be much better for us to be married at once,' said Weddale, after he had listened to a long account of how ill his betrothed had been treated.

'I am almost afraid it would,' sighed Sophia.

'Afraid, Sophia!' repeated Weddale; but though hurt, he spoke so quietly she did not notice it.

'I mean,' she continued, 'that we should have to resign the idea of all the elegancies with which we thought to have surrounded ourselves.'

'And such would have much effect upon your happiness?' asked the young artist in a very low, though steady voice.

'Surely,' replied Sophia, with mingled earnestness and affectation, for she considered it needful to vindicate the gentility of her mind and breeding; 'surely the elegancies and refinements of life must always have great influence on the happiness of every woman of lady like feelings, while the sharpest sting of poverty is in the rude contact which it brings her into with mean details and degrading tasks.'

Weddale who had listened to these words in silence, but with compressed lips and a paleness which increased every moment, rose at the conclusion.

'It must be years,' said he, in a voice of suppressed emotion, 'perhaps many years, ere I could offer those elegancies and refinements to my wife; and I will never seek to force the meanness and degradation of my poverty upon you!'

He then bowed and left the room ere Sophia realised the truth that he was deeply offended. She was astonished; for she had looked upon her late remarks but as raising her in his estimation, by giving him additional proof how completely her ideas and feelings were those of a most perfect lady. But with her usual disregard of the feelings of others, or perhaps unconsciousness of what true feeling was, she had never considered how deeply her words might wound her lover, nor how much they must lead him to mistrust her affection.

But day after day passed, and Weddale came not; and when the drawing day arrived it only brought an excuse—he was so much engaged, it was out of his power to come; and a few days after he resigned his engagement altogether, stating as his reason that he had accepted an offer to go abroad to take sketches for an illustrated work.

And now for the first time the full extent of her folly burst upon Sophia, and she saw with bitter regret how, by her own silly vanity and ill-timed airs, she had driven from her one who loved her, and sent him forth believing her a vain and heartless being, who deserved to be despised and then forgotten. In the vehemence of her grief and repentance she sent him a note entreating to see him once again before he departed. But he was