

LORD BILLY'S FADS.

When Lord William Willoughby went to Eton, his chums, and he soon had many, called him Willie. Six months later this name was dropped and Billy substituted. Billy fitted the lad like his gloves, and last of all longer.

Lord Billy was rather a queer fish. He had notions of equality and fraternity not at all in keeping with the traditions of his family and order. He had a fancy of chumming with boys bearing the plebeian patronymics of Smith, Brown, Jones and Robinson, and assiduously cultivated their acquaintance as long as said Smith, Brown & Co. behaved as young gentlemen should. Did the plebeian blood assert itself, I Smith or Jones guilty of a caddish action, then Lord Billy cut him dead.

He tagged Tom Rodgers whose father had made a large fortune by supplying the British army with uniforms. Rodgers was a cad and rascal, who filled his letters home with allusion to "my tag, Lord William Willoughby."

Lord Billy disliked him intensely, but did not allow this dislike to color his intercourse with others who were neither cads nor toadies. Did a tradesman's son who had found his way to Eton meet with contempt because his father had been a draper or a dyer, Lord Billy speedily sought him out and made much of him.

"What has he done?" he would ask. "His father made his money in trade. What of that? I wish mine had. Trade is a sort of labor, and labor in ennobling. He's as good as I am, and rather better than some of you fellows who look down on him."

Queer notions these to be held and expressed by a lad born in the purple. He took them with him to Cambridge, and practiced what he preached. His associates were mostly sizers, and he was rarely seen with a man of his own rank. He worked hard, but he learned vastly more in the town than in the university proper. He became a very skilful mechanic. He could give points to the test cabinet maker in the Cam; he was a fair decorative artist; a decent locksmith, a thorough electrician; in fact, he might be said to be a jack of all trades, and if not quite master of them all, something very near akin to it. Of course he was laughed at, and occasionally sneered at, but Lord Billy did not care a straw for the first, and gave as good as he received to the sneerers.

"Qualifying for a wage of a pound a week and two rooms in a London slum? Well, yes, if you put it in that way. I should say a pound a week is just twenty shillings more than you'll ever earn, unless you turn bookmaker or keep a gambling hell."

Lord Billy was very plain spoken, as an independent British workman has a right to be. He disdained keen, cutting sarcasm, and hit out straight from the shoulder. His retorts may have been somewhat brutal in their bluntness, but he was blunt Lord Billy.

At 21 he inherited £10,000 a year, and his friends were rather puzzled as to what he would do with it. Of one thing they were certain—he would never fill that place in society which was his by right, of his rank and fortune. His mother, the Dowager Marchioness of Rockminster, wished him to marry early. A wife, especially if lovely and charming, might win him back to the patrician fold; nothing else could.

Of this she had long been assured. At Rockminster there was a room fitted up as a workshop. Under one window stood a wood turner's lathe; under another, a mechanic's. An anvil and blacksmith's hearth, patent bellows, and all complete, filled the corner occupied by the fireplace, while ranged round the walls were tools whose uses could only have been told by a jack of all trades, or Lord Billy himself. Here the young nobleman executed repairs in metal work, made gate latches and door handles and did all sorts of odd jobs, greatly to the annoyance of the village Vulcan, who almost found his occupation gone.

"What's the world a-comin' to?" he would ask Lubin, who had brought a couple of horses to be shod. "Whatever'll happen next, I wonder? Here's Lord Wilum been a-makin' a new patent 'oss shoe as don't wear no nail to hold it on. Fixed it wi a screw at the toe an' two at the heel. Now to do to the foot as the 'oss's hoof and screw it up, and there you are. Out on screw new-fangled notions! What for does he want to bother his head wi' blacksmith's work? Tother day the Marquis was going to send for me to make some trivets an' alter the jack at the kitchen fireplace. I could ha' made a month's job on it. What does Lord Wilum do? Why, just says he'll do it, an' does it in a week. He'd ought to be ashamed to take the tread out of an honest man's mouth."

Vulcan had reason on his side. What business had the son of one marquis and the brother of another to interfere between metal and labor, taking the plums out of the cake and throwing them away, doing work gratuitously for which Vulcan would have been well paid?

Some months ago, before the Dowager Marchioness could be induced to enter it, had she not particularly desired an interview with her second son she might never have visited it.

Lord Billy was making a set of patent shoes for his favorite hunter. Being engaged in farrier's or blacksmith's work he was clad in keeping with the occupation—i. e., he was stripped to the shirt, the collar open, his shirt sleeves were rolled up above the elbows, and the brown arms thus revealed were such as even Longfellow's blacksmith would not have been ashamed to own.

To protect his nether garments from the fiery sparks he wore a huge leather apron which almost touched the ground. Yet, despite his attire and occupation, no one could possibly have taken Lord Billy to be any other than a gentleman, and a very handsome one.

Dark brown hair curled over his lofty forehead; his dark brown eyes were honesty itself, and the slight beard—Lord Billy held razors in contempt—set off his regular features and massive chin to perfection. Surely a finer specimen of manhood never hammered red hot iron on anvil, which was what Lord Billy was doing when a rather loud tap on the door attracted his attention.

"Come in!" he shouted, and went on with his work as earnestly as if his living depended upon it, for none knew better

than Lord Billy that the proper time to strike iron is while it is hot. He also knew that an unnecessary heating would ruin the temper of the metal. So, holding the half formed horseshoe firmly with the pincers, he hammered away, sending a shower of sparks in every direction as he turned the glowing metal round the narrow, circular arm of the anvil in quite professional style.

When the last spark had been hammered out of the iron he looked up to see his mother standing in the doorway, holding up her velvet skirts with both hands, an expression of horror blent with dismay on her generally placid face.

Lord Billy plunged his horseshoe into the cold water tank, where it hissed and spluttered as if angry at being compelled to relinquish what remained of its heat in a cloud of steam. This done, he strode across the room.

"Welcome, mother mine, to the Rockminster forge," he cried, an amused smile playing about his handsome face. "Enter. I can't offer you a chair; indeed, I don't think it advisable to sit down, everything is so covered with dust."

"It is," said the Marchioness with a little shudder, still carefully holding her rich velvets from contact with the floor. "I came to have a little private conversation with you, but really, William, you are too disreputable. You look like a traveling tinker."

"Can't deny it, mother mine," laughed Lord Billy. "I am sufficiently grimy to be an itinerant tinker, or even a chimney sweep. Will, I flatter myself I could earn a decent living at either occupation."

"Don't talk absurd nonsense, William!" returned the Marchioness severely. "People think you are crazy, and, really, I am not sure myself that you are perfectly sane. You, who ought to be in Parliament or in the Guards, are happy only when you are making horseshoes. You are a disgrace to your name, William!"

Lord Billy laughed long and rather boisterously. "Certainly I am the only Willoughby of our stock that ever knew how to earn his living by the sweat of his brow—at least during several centuries. But honest labor is no disgrace, and I am a great deal prouder of my skill with the hammer, the chisel and the saw than I am of the name of which you have spoken."

"I know you are incorrigible, so it is useless to point out the absurdity of your proceedings. William, I came to talk to you seriously. What do you intend to do in the future? You surely can't be thinking of devoting yourself to the manufacture of shoes and doing odd jobs about the Hall."

"Sufficient for the day," quoted Lord Billy, and there he paused. He did not look upon the ability to make horseshoes as an "evil." "Seriously," he continued, "I have hardly given a thought to the future."

"Do you intend to marry?" "I think not."

"Why not?" "Because I should never feel sure that the lady who accepted me was not influenced by my title and wealth."

"That objection would fall to the ground if you were to wed a girl who was your equal in every respect. She would not be influenced by rank and wealth if they were already hers."

"Perhaps not, but if I should marry it would be outside our order."

"Do you mean to say you intend to carry this absurd craze for aying the artisan so far as that?"

Lord Billy stroked his slight beard thoughtfully. "Not necessarily," he said, after a prolonged pause; "indeed, I would rather remain a bachelor but if I do marry, my wife will be a lady able to sympathize with what you call my crazy rank. I cannot look for such sympathy in my own rank."

"No, and if you make a condition of this sympathy I doubt very much if your wife will be a lady at all," returned the Marchioness angrily.

"That she must be or I shall never marry."

"I hope you will keep in that mind, at any rate. I am thankful for small mercies. I came to tell you that Lady Mabel Vernon is coming to Rockminster next week. She is a charming creature and very lovely, but I suppose it will be useless to ask you to be civil to her. She is of our order."

"If I meet her I shall certainly be civil to her," said Lord Billy, slowly, "but I shall probably not meet her."

"Why not?" "I am going to town next week."

"Because Lady Mabel is coming?" "No, mother mine; I have contemplated it for some time. Be candid with me. Have you not asked Lady Mabel in the hope that I may fall in love with her?"

"Since you ask for candor you shall have it. I have. She is just the girl for you."

"Then," returned Lord Billy, in his most serious tone, "I must ask you to dismiss the idea from your mind. It can never be. I have not seen Lady Mabel. She may, as you say, be very charming, and very lovely, but I shall not marry in your order. My mind is made up and I shall not change it."

"William, you are a donkey!" Having expressed this opinion, the Dowager Marchioness of Rockminster gathered up her skirts and swept out of the dusty workshop.

Lord Billy laughed quietly, and having fished the horseshoe out of the water tank with the pincers, buried it in the "breezes" on the hearth, and applying himself to the bellows, speedily blew up a fierce flame, which as quickly converted the dull, craggy piece of iron into a glowing crescent. An hour later he had finished his task. The set of patent shoes were made.

"They may say what they like," thought the noble blacksmith, as he proudly contemplated his handiwork, "but until I can find a girl who can sympathize with honest labor I remain a bachelor."

CHAPTER II.

The electrical engineering firm of Brown & Stanhope was on what Mr. Brown called "its last legs." Want of capital had brought it to this sorry pass. Unless some good samaritan could be found to put £10,000 into the business it must stop. The firm's "last legs" were shaky and feeble, and could not support it any longer.

"I admit we must have money," he was saying; "we can't go on without it; but we can't expect it to come to us. I am not so sanguine as to suppose that £10,000 will walk into this office of its own accord and say: 'Here I am, gentleman; discharge your liabilities and start anew. Go slow next time, and build no more houses of cards on your patents.' You say I am an optimist. I am, and nil desperandum is my maxim."

"That's all very well," growled Mr. Brown. "I know when I am beaten; you don't. What are the facts? We have been advertising for the last three months for a partner with capital. We've had dozens of applicants for the vacancy, but a glance at our statement of affairs has frightened them all away. We've lost on the average a thousand a year since we started. Do you expect to find an idiot willing to assist us to bear the loss a few years longer?"

"No; I expect to find a man able to look into the future with my eyes. Our patents have a future before them, and I shall stick to the ship as long as two planks hold together."

"Then it's time to jump into the lifeboat and sheer off," snarled the pessimist. "The last two planks have parted this morning. Read this."

And Mr. Brown handed his partner a document which had come into his possession, much against his will, an hour previously—to wit, a writ.

"This is very awkward just now," said the optimist, twirling his fair mustache, "very awkward, indeed. I don't see any way out of the wood at present."

"I should say not," returned Mr. Brown in a tone that implied gratification at having got the best of the argument, despite the fact that it meant ruin.

"I really don't," continued Mr. Stanhope, "but I'll see Smith and Weston, and try to come to some arrangement."

"Don't waste precious time. Better come with me and instruct Jones to file our petition."

The door opened, giving Mr. Brown pause. A clerk entered with a card. "Lord William Willoughby," said the pessimist, reading from the card. "Show him in." Then addressing his partner: "I don't know him. Do you?"

"No." "Wonder what he wants." "I have no idea. Can't be another writ anyhow."

As Lord Billy entered, the partners rose and bowed. "Messrs. Brown and Stanhope, I presume?" said the young nobleman. The pessimist and optimist bowed again. "You have been advertising for a partner with capital," continued Lord Billy.

Mr. Brown's face fell. He had heard that remark so often. "My solicitor called upon you a month back. He reported unfavorably of your financial position, but the reverse of your business ability and personal character."

Mr. Brown looked up. He began to be interested. "Since then I have seen Stanhope's patent generator and inspected your system of installation. The generator, in my opinion, will have a large sale, and I would like to become a partner in your firm."

Mr. Stanhope had some difficulty in restraining himself from executing a horripole on the office table. Mr. Brown remained calm and cool, as cool as the proverbial cucumber.

"A sleeping partner, I presume?" he said interrogatively. "No; active. I have studied electricity, and fancy I may be of service. Can you, in a few words, make me acquainted with your present financial position?"

"Certainly, my lord," said the pessimist, taking up the writ. "This document was served on me this morning. When you called I was trying to persuade my partner to agree to the filing of our petition."

"Candid, at any rate," thought Lord Billy, "I like candor." Then aloud: "What are your liabilities?" "About eighteen thousand."

"And your assets?" "About twelve. A forced sale would reduce them one half."

"Very good. You are—"

"Mr. Brown. This is Mr. Stanhope," Lord Billy bowed to the optimist.

"My solicitor, Mr. Steel of the Temple, will see to the arrangements," he went on. "As this is pressing, laying his hand on the writ, 'perhaps you will allow me to take it to Mr. Steele at once.'"

"Only too pleased, I can assure you, my lord," said Mr. Brown, with his saturnine smile.

Lord Billy pocketed the writ and took up his hat. "I think that is all," he said. "Oh, by the way, I would like to be known and addressed as Mr. Willoughby."

"Certainly, my lord," said the pessimist, inadvertently ignoring the request.

Lord Billy smiled, bade the partners good morning and left the office.

"Now," said the optimist, triumphantly, "what do you think of the ship now?" "Going into dry dock to be caulked and generally repaired," returned the pessimist. "We are lucky—very lucky. We couldn't have a better man. If we again get into a hole he'll write us a check and ask us no questions. He'll soon be tired of taking an active part. These aristocratic swells don't like work. You'll see he'll turn up at the office at 10 very regularly for a fortnight. Then he'll want a holiday, and when the holiday's over he'll look in once a week to see how we're getting on."

It is the easiest thing in the world to be mistaken. When the partnership deed had been signed and the £10,000 paid into the bank Lord Billy came to the office and speedily made himself acquainted with the firm's business. Nor did he confine himself to the office.

He visited the works every day, and speedily showed that practical electrician, Mr. Stanhope, that he was familiar with every branch of mechanics. He would take off his coat and show a stupid workman how to turn a joint or make a light supporter. He suggested improvements in "Stanhope's Generator," and the patentee accepted gladly.

"Mr. Willoughby's a marvel," he one day told the senior partner, Mr. Brown, the pessimist.

"It won't last," was the reply. But it did last.

"Two ladies have called," said the pessimist, when Lord Billy reached the office. "I gathered that they wished to

have an appointment, but it is necessary that one of the firm should go. Brown will be engaged until 12."

"I will go," said Lord Billy, promptly. An hour later he and a staff of workmen were busily engaged measuring floors and ceilings, and making other preparations for the installation.

Naturally the owner of the house was greatly interested. He hurried question after question at Mr. Willoughby's head, and Lord Billy answered him courteously, and with a profound knowledge of the subject.

Presently Sir Thomas was joined by a young lady, who evinced as great an interest as the Baronet himself.

"I hope you will not think me inquisitive, Mr. Willoughby," she remarked after a string of questions, all of which Lord Billy had replied to satisfactorily. "I have studied electricity, and I think it a most interesting science."

"You ought to have been a man, my dear," said Sir Thomas. "Would you believe, Mr. Willoughby, that this young lady has a room fitted up with lathe and bench, and hung round with tools instead of pictures? There isn't a mirror, an easy chair, or even a French novel in it. I have seen her at work with her sleeves turned up, so I can testify that which I do know."

Lord Billy gazed earnestly at this very extraordinary young lady.

"She wouldn't laugh me out of my crazy," she would sympathize with honest labor, he thought. "And she is undoubtedly a beauty," he further reflected.

She was and a very charming one. There was nothing masculine in her appearance. She was rather under the middle height; her figure straight and girlish. A mass of auburn hair curled over a low, broad forehead. Her nose was slightly tipped her complexion pale; her expression arch.

"If you tell my secret abroad I will not allow you to enter my workshop again," she returned, a merry twinkle in her eye. "Uncle surprised me, Mr. Willoughby. I generally lock the door. I omitted to do so, and this is the consequence. I suppose I ought to be ashamed to own to such an unfeminine taste, but I am not, for I am never so happy as—when my sleeves are turned up."

Lord Billy thought he would like to see her when at her happiest, wondered if she could make a horseshoe and if she wore a leather apron.

"It is an unusual recreation for a lady, certainly," but your leisure might easily be employed in a less healthy occupation."

There and then he made up his mind, if occasion offered, to ask her if she would like to visit the electrical engineering works of Messrs. Brown, Stanhope & Willoughby, and congratulated himself that he had so good an excuse to become better acquainted with Sir Thomas Mowbray's niece, whose name he did not know, but who so exactly represented the ideal woman who, if he ever married, was to tempt him to join the noble army of benedictines.

There was no particular reason why a member of the firm should visit the house in Park Lane a second time, the foreman being a practical man, and well up to his work; Lord Billy, however, took upon himself to superintend the installation. He called every day during a week, but the fair artisan was not to be seen. He desired very much to know her name, but not caring to question the servants, failed to learn it. Of course he did not presume to ask Sir Thomas, whom he met daily.

"I fancy I am wasting my time," he reflected after the sixth disappointment. "If the men called me 'my lord,' instead of 'Mr. Willoughby,' the young lady might be more visible."

Perhaps for the first time in his life he saw the advantage of a title. Hitherto he had affected to despise it. He was convinced that a lord with a taste for mechanical labor would of necessity be very interesting to a lady similarly affected, and for some reason no difficult to define desired to be interesting to Sir Thomas's charming niece.

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see the works, but as you were out they said that they would call to-morrow. The younger one particularly desired that Mr. Willoughby should conduct them," with marked stress on the "Mr."

"Did they leave their cards?" "No. I gathered that the elder lady's name was Mrs. Malcolm. I did not learn the young lady's."

"Can you describe her?" "Certainly. Rather pale, with auburn hair."

"It must be Sir Thomas Mowbray's niece. She is interested in electricity. I will remain here to-morrow."

Lord Billy went to his club and passed an hour study Burke, DeBrett and the Court Directory in the vague hope that the name of the elder lady would afford a clue to that of his charmer. He found the clan Malcolm far too numerous.

There was nothing for it but to wait patiently for the morrow.

He reached the office punctually at 10, and spent some little time in consultation with the optimist and pessimist. Although only junior partner, and an "aristocratic swell" to boot, he was already the master spirit of the firm. Messrs. Brown and Stanhope had soon discovered that Lord Billy would not play second fiddle to any one.

At 11 the expected ladies arrived. The younger greeted Mr. Willoughby warmly, and bowed graciously to the other members of the firm. Mrs. Malcolm, however, was almost as frigid as an icicle.

"Machinery has no interest for me," she said haughtily, when Lord Billy courteously addressed his remarks to her. "I have merely accompanied my niece. I must tell you, Mr. Willoughby, that I do not approve of her unladylike taste for machines and mechanics," she added after a pause.

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the angry. The speaker, the young lady who dabbled in mechanics and interested herself in electricity, stood erect, facing Mrs. Malcolm, an angry flush on her generally pale face.

"With board schools so prevalent in the land it is easy to become a gentleman," sneered the elder lady. "I don't deny that he is a gentlemanly young man; so is Tompkins, the poultryer, and Mr. Green, the tax collector."

"Why do you get out of your way to insult him by linking his name with these people?"

"To show you the folly of visiting the works a second time. He presumed upon his slight acquaintance with you at your uncle's. I did not like his manner at all. It was far too familiar. Why, if he were your equal, he could not have addressed you with—"

"More gentlemanly ease and self-possession?"

"No, Mabel; with more insolent assurance."

"Now you are harsh and unjust. Mr. Willoughby interests me. I, I fancy, interest him. He is a member of a prominent engineering firm. So really we are not equals. What of that? Do you think I am going to fall in love with the man and marry him? For aught I know to the contrary, he is already married. It is sufficiently courteous to take the trouble to explain something I wish to understand, and for this reason I wish to revisit the works. Now are you satisfied?"

This little storm in a teacup has its origin thus: The young lady known to Lord Billy as Miss Verner had expressed her intention of paying another visit to Messrs. Brown, Stanhope & Willoughby's works. Mrs. Malcolm had strenuously objected, and had concluded her remarks with the question:

"I presume you want to see that man again?"

Hence the young lady's indignant outburst. She repeated her question.