

FICTION

Frank Harris

A Modern Idyll

A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK



eBookTakeAway

FICTION

A MODERN IDYLL

By Frank Harris

"I call it real good of you, Mr. Letgood, to come and see me. Won't you be seated?"

"Thank you. It's very warm to-day; and as I didn't feel like reading or writing, I thought I'd come round."

"You're just too kind for anythin'! To come an' pay me a visit when you must be tired out with yesterday's preachin'. An' what a sermon you gave us in the mornin'--it was too sweet. I had to wink my eyes pretty hard, an' pull the tears down the back way, or I should have cried right out--and Mrs. Jones watchin' me all the time under that dreadful bonnet."

Mrs. Hooper had begun with a shade of nervousness in the hurried words; but the emotion disappeared as she took up a comfortable pose in the corner of the small sofa.

The Rev. John Letgood, having seated himself in an armchair, looked at her intently before replying. She was well worth looking at, this Mrs. Hooper, as she leaned back on the cushions in her cool white dress, which was so thin and soft and well-fitting that her form could be seen through it almost as clearly as through water. She appeared to be about eighteen years old, and in reality was not yet twenty. At first sight one would have said of her, "a pretty girl;" but an observant eye on the second glance would have noticed those contradictions in face and in form which bear witness to a certain complexity of nature. Her features were small, regular, and firmly cut; the long, brown eyes looked out confidently under straight, well-defined brows; but the forehead was low, and the sinuous lips a vivid red. So, too, the slender figure and narrow hips formed a contrast with the throat, which pouted in soft, white fulness.

"I am glad you liked the sermon," said the minister, breaking the silence, "for it is not probable that you will hear many more from me." There was just a shade of sadness in the lower tone with which he ended the phrase. He let the sad note drift in unconsciously--by dint of practice he had become an artist in the management of his voice.

"You don't say!" exclaimed Mrs. Hooper, sitting up straight in her excitement "You ain't goin' to leave us, I hope?"

"Why do you pretend, Belle, to misunderstand me? You know I said three months ago that if you didn't care for me I should have to leave this place. And yesterday I told you that you must make up your mind at once, as I was daily expecting a call to Chicago. Now I have come for your answer, and you treat me as if I were a stranger, and you knew nothing of what I feel for you."

"Oh!" she sighed, languorously nestling back into the corner. "Is that all? I thought for a moment the 'call' had come."

"No, it has not yet; but I am resolved to get an answer from you to-day, or I shall go away, call or no call."

"What would Nettie Williams say if she heard you?" laughed Mrs. Hooper, with mischievous delight in her eyes.

"Now, Belle," he said in tender remonstrance, leaning forward and taking the small cool hand in his, "what is my answer to be? Do you love me? Or am I to leave Kansas City, and try somewhere else to get again into the spirit of my work? God forgive me, but I want you to tell me to stay. Will you?"

"Of course I will," she returned, while slowly withdrawing her hand. "There ain't any one wants you to go, and why should you?"

"Why? Because my passion for you prevents me from doing my work. You tease and torture me with doubt, and when I should be thinking of my duties I am wondering whether or not you care for me. Do you love me? I must have a plain answer."

"Love you?" she repeated pensively. "I hardly know, but--"

"But what?" he asked impatiently.

"But--I must just see after the pies; this 'help' of ours is Irish, an' doesn't know enough to turn them in the oven. And Mr. Hooper don't like burnt pies."

She spoke with coquettish gravity, and got up to go out of the room. But when Mr. Letgood also rose, she stopped and smiled--waiting perhaps for him to take his leave. As he did not speak she shook out her frock and then pulled down her bodice at the waist and drew herself up, thus throwing into relief the willowy outlines of her girlish form. The provocative grace, unconscious or intentional, of the attitude was not lost on her admirer. For an instant he stood irresolute, but when she stepped forward to pass him, he seemed to lose his self-control, and, putting his arms round her, tried to kiss her. With serpent speed and liveness she bowed her head against his chest, and slipped out of the embrace. On reaching the door she paused to say, over her shoulder: "If you'll wait, I'll be back right soon;" then, as a new thought had occurred to her, she added turning to him: "The Deacon told me he was coming home early to-day,

and he'd be real sorry to miss you."

As she disappeared, he took up his hat, and left the house.

It was about four o'clock on a day in mid-June. The sun was pouring down rays of liquid flame; the road, covered inches deep in fine white dust, and the wooden side-walks glowed with the heat, but up and down the steep hills went the minister unconscious of physical discomfort.

"Does she care for me, or not? Why can't she tell me plainly? The teasing creature! Did she give me the hint to go because she was afraid her husband would come in? Or did she want to get rid of me in order not to answer?... She wasn't angry with me for putting my arms round her, and yet she wouldn't let me kiss her. Why not? She doesn't love him. She married him because she was poor, and he was rich and a deacon. She can't love him. He must be fifty-five if he's a day. Perhaps she doesn't love me either--the little flirt! But how seductive she is, and what a body, so round and firm and supple--not thin at all. I have the feel of it on my hands now--I can't stand this."

Shaking himself vigorously, he abandoned his meditation, which, like many similar ones provoked by Mrs. Hooper, had begun in vexation and ended in passionate desire. Becoming aware of the heat and dust, he stood still, took off his hat, and wiped his forehead.

The Rev. John Letgood was an ideal of manhood to many women. He was largely built, but not ungainly--the coarseness of the hands being the chief indication of his peasant ancestry. His head was rather round, and strongly set on broad shoulders; the nose was straight and well formed; the dark eyes, however, were somewhat small, and the lower part of the face too massive, though both chin and jaw were clearly marked. A long, thick, brown moustache partly concealed the mouth; the lower lip could just be seen, a little heavy, and sensual; the upper one was certainly flexible and suave. A good-looking man of thirty, who must have been handsome when he was twenty, though even then, probably, too much drawn by the pleasures of the senses to have had that distinction of person which seems to be reserved for those who give themselves to thought or high emotions. On entering his comfortable house, he was met by his negro "help," who handed him his "mail": "I done brot these, Massa; they's all." "Thanks, Pete," he replied abstractedly, going into his cool study. He flung himself into an armchair before the writing-table, and began to read the letters. Two were tossed aside carelessly, but on opening the third he sat up with a quick exclamation. Here at last was the "call" he had been expecting, a "call" from the deacons of the Second Baptist Church in Chicago, asking him to come and minister to their spiritual wants, and offering him ten thousand dollars a year for his services.

For a moment exultation overcame every other feeling in the man. A light flashed in his eyes as he exclaimed aloud: "It was that sermon did it! What a good thing it was that I knew their senior deacon was in the church on purpose to hear me! How well I brought in the apostrophe on the cultivation of character that won me the prize at college! Ah, I have never done anything finer than that, never! and perhaps never shall now. I had been reading Channing then for months, was steeped in him; but Channing has nothing as good as that in all his works. It has more weight and dignity--dignity is the word--than anything he wrote. And to think of its bringing me this! Ten thousand dollars a year and the second church in Chicago, while here they think me well paid with five. Chicago! I must accept it at once. Who knows, perhaps I shall get to New York yet, and move as many thousands as here I move hundreds. No! not I. I do not move them. I am weak and sinful. It is the Holy Spirit, and the power of His grace. O Lord, I am thankful to Thee who hast been good to me unworthy!" A pang of fear shot through him: "Perhaps He sends this to win me away from Belle." His fancy called her up before him as she had lain on the sofa. Again he saw the bright malicious glances and the red lips, the full white throat, and the slim roundness of her figure. He bowed his head upon his hands and groaned. "O Lord, help me! I know not what to do. Help me, O Lord!"

As if prompted by a sudden inspiration, he started to his feet. "Now she must answer! Now what will she say? Here *is* the call. Ten thousand dollars a year! What will she say to that?"

He spoke aloud in his excitement, all that was masculine in him glowing with the sense of hard-won mastery over the tantalizing evasiveness of the woman.

On leaving his house he folded up the letter, thrust it into the breast-pocket of his frock-coat, and strode rapidly up the hill towards Mrs. Hooper's. At first he did not even think of her last words, but when he had gone up and down the first hill and was beginning to climb the second they suddenly came back to him. He did not want to meet her husband--least of all now. He paused. What should he do? Should he wait till to-morrow? No, that was out of the question; he couldn't wait. He must know what answer to send to the call. If Deacon Hooper happened to be at home he would talk to him about the door of the vestry, which would not shut properly. If the Deacon was not there, he would see her and force a confession from her...

While the shuttle of his thought flew thus to and fro, he did not at all realize that he was taking for granted what he had refused to believe half an hour before. He felt certain now that Deacon Hooper would not be in, and that Mrs. Hooper had got rid of him on purpose to avoid his importunate love-making. When he reached the house and rang the bell his first question was:

"Is the Deacon at home?"

"No, sah."

"Is Mrs. Hooper in?"

"Yes, sah."

"Please tell her I should like to see her for a moment. I will not keep her long. Say it's very important."

"Yes, Massa, I bring her shuah," said the negress with a good-natured grin, opening the door of the drawing-room.

In a minute or two Mrs. Hooper came into the room looking as cool and fresh as if "pies" were baked in ice.

"Good day, *again* Mr. Letgood. Won't you take a chair?"

He seemed to feel the implied reproach, for without noticing her invitation to sit down he came to the point at once. Plunging his hand into his pocket, he handed her the letter from Chicago.

She took it with the quick interest of curiosity, but as she read, the colour deepened in her cheeks, and before she had finished it she broke out, "Ten thousand dollars a year!"

As she gave the letter back she did not raise her eyes, but said musingly: "That is a call indeed..." Staring straight before her she added: "How strange it should come to-day! Of course you'll accept it."

A moment, and she darted the question at him:

"Does she know? Have you told Miss Williams yet? But there, I suppose you have!" After another pause, she went on:

"What a shame to take you away just when we had all got to know and like you! I suppose we shall have some old fogley now who will preach against dancin' an' spellin'-bees an' surprise-parties. And, of course, he won't like me, or come here an' call as often as you do--makin' the other girls jealous. I shall hate the change!" And in her innocent excitement she slowly lifted her brown eyes to his.

"You know you're talking nonsense, Belle," he replied, with grave earnestness. "I've come for *your* answer. If you wish me to stay, if you really care for me, I shall refuse this offer."

"You don't tell!" she exclaimed. "Refuse ten thousand dollars a year and a church in Chicago to stay here in Kansas City! I know I shouldn't! Why," and she fixed her eyes on his as she spoke, "you must be real good even to think of such a thing. But then, you won't refuse," she added, pouting. "No one would," she concluded, with profound conviction.

"Oh, yes," answered the minister, moving to her and quietly putting both hands on her waist, while his voice seemed to envelope and enfold her with melodious tenderness.

"Oh, yes, I shall refuse it, Belle, if *you* wish me to; refuse it as I should ten times as great a prize, as I think I should refuse--God forgive me!--heaven itself, if you were not there to make it beautiful."

While speaking he drew her to him gently; her body yielded to his touch, and her gaze, as if fascinated, was drawn into his. But when the flow of words ceased, and he bent to kiss her, the spell seemed to lose its power over her. In an instant she wound herself out of his arms, and with startled eyes aslant whispered:

"Hush! he's coming! Don't you hear his step?" As Mr. Letgood went again towards her with a tenderly reproachful and incredulous "Now, Belle," she stamped impatiently on the floor while exclaiming in a low, but angry voice, "Do take care! That's the Deacon's step."

At the same moment her companion heard it too. The sounds were distinct on the wooden side-walk, and when they ceased at the little gate four or five yards from the house he knew that she was right.

He pulled himself together, and with a man's untimely persistence spoke hurriedly:

"I shall wait for your answer till Sunday morning next. Before then you must have assured me of your love, or I shall go to Chicago--"

Mrs. Hooper's only reply was a contemptuous, flashing look that succeeded in reducing the importunate clergyman to silence--just in time--for as the word "Chicago" passed his lips the handle of the door turned, and Deacon Hooper entered the room.

"Why, how do you do, Mr. Letgood?" said the Deacon cordially. "I'm glad to see you, sir, as you are too, I'm sartin," he added, turning to his wife and putting his arms round her waist and his lips to her cheek in an affectionate caress. "Take a seat, won't you? It's too hot to stand." As Mrs. Hooper sank down beside him on the sofa and their visitor drew over a chair, he went on, taking up again the broken thread of his thought. "No one thinks more of you than Isabelle. She said only last Sunday there warn't such a preacher as you west of the Mississippi River. How's that for high, eh?"--And then, still seeking back like a dog on a lost scent, he added, looking from his wife to the clergyman, as if recalled to a sense of the actualities of the situation by a certain constraint in their manner, "But what's that I heard about Chicago? There ain't nothin' fresh--Is there?"

"Oh," replied Mrs. Hooper, with a look of remonstrance thrown sideways at her admirer, while with a woman's quick decision she at once cut the knot, "I guess there is something fresh. Mr. Letgood, just think of it, has had a 'call' from

the Second Baptist Church in Chicago, and it's ten thousand dollars a year. Now who's right about his preachin'? And he ain't goin' to accept it. He's goin' to stay right here. At least," she added coyly, "he said he'd refuse it--didn't you?"

The Deacon stared from one to the other as Mr. Letgood, with a forced half-laugh which came from a dry throat, answered: "That would be going perhaps a little too far. I said," he went on, catching a coldness in the glance of the brown eyes, "I wished to refuse it. But of course I shall have to consider the matter thoroughly--and seek for guidance."

"Wall," said the Deacon in amazement, "ef that don't beat everythin'. I guess nobody would refuse an offer like that. *Ten thousand dollars a year!* Ten thousand. Why, that's twice what you're get-tin' here. You can't refuse that. I know you wouldn't ef you war' a son of mine--as you might be. Ten thousand. No, sir. An' the Second Baptist Church in Chicago is the first; it's the best, the richest, the largest. There ain't no sort of comparison between it and the First. No, sir! There ain't none. Why, James P. Willis, him as was here and heard you--that's how it came about, that's how!--he's the senior Deacon of it, an' I guess he can count dollars with any man this side of New York. Yes, sir, with any man west of the Alleghany Mountains." The breathless excitement of the good Deacon changed gradually as he realized that his hearers were not in sympathy with him, and his speech became almost solemn in its impressiveness as he continued. "See here! This ain't a thing to waste. Ten thousand dollars a year to start with, an' the best church in Chicago, you can't expect to do better than that. Though you're young still, when the chance comes, it should be gripped."

"Oh, pshaw!" broke in Mrs. Hooper irritably, twining her fingers and tapping the carpet with her foot, "Mr. Letgood doesn't want to leave Kansas City. Don't you understand? Perhaps he likes the folk here just as well as any in Chicago." No words could describe the glance which accompanied this. It was appealing, and coquettish, and triumphant, and the whole battery was directed full on Mr. Letgood, who had by this time recovered his self-possession.

"Of course," he said, turning to the Deacon and overlooking Mrs. Hooper's appeal, "I know all that, and I don't deny that the 'call' at first seemed to draw me." Here his voice dropped as if he were speaking to himself: "It offers a wider and a higher sphere of work, but there's work, too, to be done here, and I don't know that the extra salary ought to tempt me. *Take neither scrip nor money in your purse,*" and he smiled, "you know."

"Yes," said the Deacon, his eyes narrowing as if amazement were giving place to a new emotion; "yes, but that ain't meant quite literally, I reckon. Still, it's fer you to judge. But ef you refuse ten thousand dollars a year, why, there are mighty few who would, and that's all I've got to say--mighty few," he added emphatically, and stood up as if to shake off the burden of a new and, therefore, unwelcome thought.

When the minister also rose, the physical contrast between the two men became significant. Mr. Letgood's heavy frame, due to self-indulgence or to laziness, might have been taken as a characteristic product of the rich, western prairies, while Deacon Hooper was of the pure Yankee type. His figure was so lank and spare that, though not quite so tall as his visitor, he appeared to be taller. His face was long and angular; the round, clear, blue eyes, the finest feature of it, the narrowness of the forehead the worst. The mouth- corners were drawn down, and the lips hardened to a line by constant compression. No trace of sensuality. How came this man, grey with age, to marry a girl whose appeal to the senses was already so obvious? The eyes and prominent temples of the idealist supplied the answer. Deacon Hooper was a New Englander, trained in the bitterest competition for wealth, and yet the Yankee in him masked a fund of simple, kindly optimism, which showed itself chiefly in his devoted affection for his wife. He had not thought of his age when he married, but of her and her poverty. And possibly he was justified. The snow-garment of winter protects the tender spring wheat.

"It's late," Mr. Letgood began slowly, "I must be going home now. I thought you might like to hear the news, as you are my senior Deacon. Your advice seems excellent; I shall weigh the 'call' carefully; but"--with a glance at Mrs. Hooper--"I am disposed to refuse it." No answering look came to him. He went on firmly and with emphasis, "*I wish* to refuse it.--Good day, Mrs. Hooper, *till next Sunday*. Good day, Deacon."

"Good day, Mr. Letgood," she spoke with a little air of precise courtesy.

"Good day, sir," replied the Deacon, cordially shaking the proffered hand, while he accompanied his pastor to the street door.

The sun was sinking, and some of the glory of the sunset colouring seemed to be reflected in Deacon Hooper's face, as he returned to the drawing-room and said with profound conviction:--

"Isabelle, that man's jest about as good as they make them. He's what I call a real Christian--one that thinks of duty first and himself last. Ef that ain't a Christian, I'd like to know what is."

"Yes," she rejoined meditatively, as she busied herself arranging the chairs and tidying the sofa into its usual stiff primness; "I guess he's a good man." And her cheek flushed softly.

"Wall," he went on warmly, "I reckon we ought to do somethin' in this. There ain't no question but he fills the church. Ef we raised the pew-rents we could offer him an increase of salary to stay--I guess that could be done."

"Oh! don't do anything," exclaimed the wife, as if awaking to the significance of this proposal, "anyway not until he

has decided. It would look--mean, don't you think? to offer him somethin' more to stay."

"I don't know but you're right, Isabelle; I don't know but you're right," repeated her husband thoughtfully. "It'll look better if he decides before hearin' from us. There ain't no harm, though, in thinkin' the thing over and speakin' to the other Deacons about it. I'll kinder find out what they feel."

"Yes," she replied mechanically, almost as if she had not heard. "Yes, that's all right." And she slowly straightened the cloth on the centre-table, given over again to her reflections.

Mr. Letgood walked home, ate his supper, went to bed and slept that night as only a man does whose nervous system has been exhausted by various and intense emotions. He even said his prayers by rote. And like a child he slept with tightly-clenched fists, for in him, as in the child, the body's claims were predominant.

When he awoke next morning, the sun was shining in at his bedroom window, and at once his thoughts went back to the scenes and emotions of the day before. An unusual liveliness of memory enabled him to review the very words which Mrs. Hooper had used. He found nothing to regret. He had certainly gained ground by telling her of the call. The torpor which had come upon him the previous evening formed a complete contrast to the blithesome vigour he now enjoyed. He seemed to himself to be a different man, recreated, as it were, and endowed with fresh springs of life. While he lay in the delightful relaxation and warmth of the bed, and looked at the stream of sunshine which flowed across the room, he became confident that all would go right.

"Yes," he decided, "she cares for me, or she would never have wished me to stay. Even the Deacon helped me--" The irony of the fact shocked him. He would not think of it. He might get a letter from her by two o'clock. With pleasure thrilling through every nerve, he imagined how she would word her confession. For she had yielded to him; he had felt her body move towards him and had seen the surrender in her eyes. While musing thus, passion began to stir in him, and with passion impatience.

"Only half-past six o'clock," he said to himself, pushing his watch again under the pillow; "eight hours to wait till mail time. Eight endless hours. What a plague!"

His own irritation annoyed him, and he willingly took up again the thread of his amorous reverie: "What a radiant face she has, what fine nervefulness in the slim fingers, what softness in the full throat!" Certain incidents in his youth before he had studied for the ministry came back to him, bringing the blood to his cheeks and making his temples throb. As the recollections grew vivid they became a torment. To regain quiet pulses he forced his mind to dwell upon the details of his "conversion"--his sudden resolve to live a new life and to give himself up to the service of the divine Master. The yoke was not easy; the burden was not light. On the contrary. He remembered innumerable contests with his rebellious flesh, contests in which he was never completely victorious for more than a few days together, but in which, especially during the first heat of the new enthusiasm, he had struggled desperately. Had his efforts been fruitless?...

He thought with pride of his student days--mornings given to books and to dreams of the future, and evenings marked by passionate emotions, new companions reinspiring him continually with fresh ardour. The time spent at college was the best of his life. He had really striven, then, as few strive, to deserve the prize of his high calling. During those years, it seemed to him, he had been all that an earnest Christian should be. He recalled, with satisfaction, the honours he had won in Biblical knowledge and in history, and the more easily gained rewards for rhetoric. It was only natural that he should have been immediately successful as a preacher. How often he had moved his flock to tears! No wonder he had got on.

Those first successes, and the pleasures which they brought with them of gratified vanity, had resulted in turning him from a Christian into an orator. He understood this dimly, but he thrust back the unwelcome truth with the reflection that his triumphs in the pulpit dated from the time when he began consciously to treat preaching as an art. After all, was he not there to win souls to Christ, and had not Christ himself praised the wisdom of the serpent? Then came the change from obscurity and narrow living in the country to Kansas City and luxury. He had been wise in avoiding that girl at Pleasant Hill. He smiled complacently as he thought of her dress, manners, and speech. Yet she was pretty, very pretty, and she had loved him with the exclusiveness of womanhood, but still he had done right. He congratulated himself upon his intuitive knowledge that there were finer girls in the world to be won. He had not fettered himself foolishly through pity or weakness.

During his ten years of life as a student and minister he had been chaste. He had not once fallen into flagrant sin. His fervour of unquestioning faith had saved him at the outset, and, later, habit and prudence. He lingered over his first meeting with Mrs. Hooper. He had not thought much of her then, he remembered, although she had appeared to him to be pretty and perfectly dressed. She had come before him as an embodiment of delicacy and refinement, and her charm had increased, as he began, in spite of himself, to notice her peculiar seductiveness. Recollecting how insensibly the fascination which she exercised over him had grown, and the sudden madness of desire that had forced him to declare his passion, he moaned with vexation. If only she had not been married. What a fatality! How helpless man was, tossed hither and thither by the waves of trivial circumstance!

She had certainly encouraged him; it was her alternate moods of yielding and reserve which had awakened his

senses. She had been flattered by his admiration, and had sought to call it forth. But, in the beginning, at least, he had struggled against the temptation. He had prayed for help in the sore combat--how often and how earnestly!--but no help had come. Heaven had been deaf to his entreaties. And he had soon realized that struggling in this instance was of no avail. He loved her; he desired her with every nerve of his body.

There was hardly any use in trying to fight against such a craving as that, he thought. But yet, in his heart of hearts, he was conscious that his religious enthusiasm, the aspiration towards the ideal life and the reverence for Christ's example, would bring about at least one supreme conflict in which his passion might possibly be overcome. He dreaded the crisis, the outcome of which he foresaw would be decisive for his whole life. He wanted to let himself slide quietly down the slope; but all the while he felt that something in him would never consent thus to endanger his hopes of Heaven.

And Hell! He hated the thought! He strove to put it away from him, but it would not be denied. His early habits of self-analysis reasserted themselves. What if his impatience of the idea were the result of obdurate sinfulness--sinfulness which might never be forgiven? He compelled himself, therefore, to think of Hell, tried to picture it to himself, and the soft, self-indulgent nature of the man shuddered as he realized the meaning of the word. At length the torture grew too acute. He would not think any longer; he could not; he would strive to do the right. "O Lord!" he exclaimed, as he slipped out of bed on to his knees, "O Christ! help Thy servant! Pity me, and aid!" Yet, while the words broke from his lips in terrified appeal, he knew that he did not wish to be helped. He rose to his feet in sullen dissatisfaction.

The happy alertness which he had enjoyed at his waking had disappeared; the self-torment of the last few minutes had tired him; disturbed and vexed in mind, he began to dress. While moving about in the sunlight his thoughts gradually became more cheerful, and by the time he left his room he had regained his good spirits.

After a short stroll he went into his study and read the daily paper. He then took up a book till dinner-time. He dined, and afterwards forgot himself in a story of African travels. It was only the discomfort of the intense heat which at length reminded him that, though it was now past two o'clock, he had received no letter from Mrs. Hooper. But he was resolved not to think about her, for thoughts of her, he knew, would lead to fears concerning the future, which would in turn force him to decide upon a course of action. If he determined to commit the sin, his guilt would thereby be increased, and he would not pledge himself to refrain from it. "She couldn't write last night with the Deacon at her elbow all the time," he decided, and began to read again. Darkness had fallen before he remembered that he owed an immediate answer to the letter from Chicago. After a little consideration, he sat down and wrote as follows:

"Dear Brothers in Christ,

"Your letter has just reached me. Needless to say it has touched me deeply. You call me to a wider ministry and more arduous duties. The very munificence of the remuneration which you offer leads me to doubt my own fitness for so high a post. You must bear with me a little, and grant me a few days for reflection. The 'call,' as you know, must be answered from within, from the depths of my soul, before I can be certain that it comes from Above, and this Divine assurance has not yet been vouchsafed to me.

"I was born and brought up here in Missouri, where I am now labouring, not without--to Jesus be the praise!--some small measure of success. I have many ties here, and many dear friends and fellow-workers in Christ's vineyard from whom I could not part without great pain. But I will prayerfully consider your request. I shall seek for guidance where alone it is to be found, at the foot of the Great White Throne, and within a week or so at most I hope to be able to answer you with the full and joyous certitude of the Divine blessing.

"In the meantime, believe that I thank you deeply, dear Brethren, for your goodness to me, and that I shall pray in Jesus' Name that the blessing of the Holy Ghost may be with you abundantly now and for evermore.

"Your loving Servant in Christ,

"John P. Letgood."

He liked this letter so much that he read it over a great many times. It committed him to nothing; it was dignified and yet sufficiently grateful, and the large-hearted piety which appeared to inform it pleased him even more than the alliteration of the words "born and brought up." He had at first written "born and reared;" but in spite of the fear lest "brought up" should strike the simple Deacons of the Second Baptist Church in Chicago as unfamiliar and far-fetched, he could not resist the assonance. After directing the letter he went upstairs to bed, and his prayers that night were

more earnest than they had been of late--perhaps because he avoided the dangerous topic. The exercise of his talent as a letter-writer having put him on good terms with himself, he slept soundly.

When he awoke in the morning his mood had changed. The day was cloudy; a thunderstorm was brewing, and had somehow affected his temper. As soon as he opened his eyes he was aware of the fact that Mrs. Hooper had not written to him, even on Tuesday morning, when she must have been free, for the Deacon always went early to his dry-goods store. The consciousness of this neglect irritated him beyond measure. He tried, therefore, to think of Chicago and the persons who frequented the Second Baptist Church. Perhaps, he argued, they were as much ahead of the people in Kansas City as Mrs. Hooper was superior to any woman he had previously known. But on this way of thought he could not go far. The houses in Chicago were no doubt much finer, the furniture more elegant; the living, too, was perhaps better, though he could not imagine how that could be; there might even be cleverer and handsomer women there than Mrs. Hooper; but certainly no one lived in Chicago or anywhere else in the world who could tempt and bewitch him as she did. She was formed to his taste, made to his desire. As he recalled her, now laughing at him; now admiring him; to-day teasing him with coldness, to-morrow encouraging him, he realized with exasperation that her contradictions constituted her charm. He acknowledged reluctantly that her odd turns of speech tickled his intellect just as her lithe grace of movement excited his senses. But the number and strength of the ties that bound him to her made his anger keener. Where could she hope to find such love as his? She ought to write to him. Why didn't she? How could he come to a decision before he knew whether she loved him or not? In any case he would show her that he was a man. He would not try to see her until she had written--not under any circumstances.

After dinner and mail time his thoughts ran in another channel. In reality she was not anything so wonderful. Most men, he knew, did not think her more than pretty; "pretty Mrs. Hooper" was what she was usually called--nothing more. No one ever dreamed of saying she was beautiful or fascinating. No; she was pretty, and that was all. He was the only person in Kansas City or perhaps in the world to whom she was altogether and perfectly desirable. She had no reason to be so conceited or to presume on her power over him. If she were the wonder she thought herself she would surely have married some one better than old Hooper, with his lank figure, grey hairs, and Yankee twang. He took a pleasure in thus depreciating the woman he loved--it gave his anger vent, and seemed to make her acquisition more probable. When the uselessness of the procedure became manifest to him, he found that his doubts of her affection had crystallized.

This was the dilemma; she had not written either out of coquetry or because she did not really care for him. If the former were the true reason, she was cruel; if the latter, she ought to tell him so at once, and he would try to master himself. On no hypothesis was she justified in leaving him without a word. Tortured alternately by fear, hope, and anger, he paced up and down his study all the day long. Now, he said to himself, he would go and see her, and forthwith he grew calm--that was what his nature desired. But the man in him refused to be so servile. He had told her that she must write; to that he would hold, whatever it cost him. Again, he broke out in bitter blame of her.

At length he made up his mind to strive to forget her. But what if she really cared for him, loved him as he loved her? In that case if he went away she would be miserable, as wretched as he would be. How unkind it was of her to leave him without a decided answer, when he could not help thinking of her happiness! No; she did not love him. He had read enough about women and seen enough of them to imagine that they never torture the man they really love. He would give her up and throw himself again into his work. He could surely do that. Then he remembered that she was married, and must, of course, see that she would risk her position--everything--by declaring her love. Perhaps prudence kept her silent. Once more he was plunged in doubt.

He was glad when supper was ready, for that brought, at least for half an hour, freedom from thought. After the meal was finished he realized that he was weary of it all--heart-sick of the suspense. The storm broke, and the flashing of the lightning and the falling sheets of rain brought him relief. The air became lighter and purer. He went to bed and slept heavily.

On the Thursday morning he awoke refreshed, and at once determined not to think about Mrs. Hooper. It only needed resolution, he said to himself, in order to forget her entirely. Her indifference, shown in not writing to him, should be answered in that way. He took up his pocket Bible, and opened it at the Gospels. The beautiful story soon exercised its charm upon his impressionable nature, and after a couple of hours' reading he closed the book comforted, and restored to his better self. He fell on his knees and thanked God for this crowning mercy. From his heart went forth a hymn of praise for the first time in long weeks. The words of the Man of Sorrows had lifted him above the slough. The marvel of it! How could he ever thank Him enough? His whole life should now be devoted to setting forth the wonders of His grace. When he arose he felt at peace with himself and full of goodwill to every one. He could even think of Mrs. Hooper calmly--with pity and grave kindness.

After his midday dinner and a brisk walk-->he paid no attention to the mail time--he prepared to write the sermon which he intended to preach as his farewell to his congregation on the following Sunday. He was determined now to leave Kansas City and go to Chicago. But as soon as he began to consider what he should say, he became aware of a difficulty. He could talk and write of accepting the "call" because it gave him "a wider ministry," and so forth, but the

ugly fact would obtrude itself that he was relinquishing five thousand dollars a year to accept ten, and he was painfully conscious that this knowledge would be uppermost in the minds of his hearers. Most men in his position would have easily put the objection out of their minds. But he could not put it aside carelessly, and it was characteristic of him to exaggerate its importance. He dearly loved to play what the French call *le beau role*, even at the cost of his self-interest. Of a sensitive, artistic temperament, he had for years nourished his intellect with good books. He had always striven, too, to set before his hearers high ideals of life and conduct. His nature was now subdued to the stuff he had worked in. As an artist, an orator, it was all but impossible for him to justify what must seem like sordid selfishness. He moved about in his chair uneasily, and strove to look at the subject from a new point of view. In vain; ten thousand dollars a year instead of five--that was to be his theme.

The first solution of the problem which suggested itself to him was to express his very real disdain of such base material considerations, but no sooner did the thought occur to him than he was fain to reject it. He knew well that his hearers in Kansas City would refuse to accept that explanation even as "high-falutin' bunkum!" He then tried to select a text in order to ease for a time the strain upon his reflective faculties. "Feed my sheep" was his first choice--"the largest flock possible, of course." But no, that was merely the old cant in new words.

He came reluctantly to the conclusion that there was no noble way out of the difficulty. He felt this the more painfully because, before sitting down to think of his sermon, he had immersed himself, to use his own words, in the fountain-head of self-sacrificing enthusiasm. And now he could not show his flock that there was any trace of self-denial in his conduct. It was apparent that his acceptance of the call made a great sermon an utter impossibility. He must say as little about the main point as possible, glide quickly, in fact, over the thin ice. But his disappointment was none the less keen; there was no splendid peroration to write; there would be no eyes gazing up at him through a mist of tears. His sensations were those of an actor with an altogether uncongenial and stupid part.

After some futile efforts he abandoned the attempt to sketch out a sermon. Some words would come to him at the time, and they would have to do. In the evening a new idea presented itself to his over-excited brain. Might not his dislike of that sermon be a snare set by the Devil to induce him to reject the call and stay in Kansas City? No. A fine sermon would do good--the Evil One could not desire that--perhaps even more good than his sin would do harm? Puzzled and incapable of the effort required to solve this fresh problem he went to bed, after praying humbly for guidance and enlightenment.

On the Friday morning he rose from his knees with a burden of sorrow. No kindly light had illumined the darkness of his doubtings. Yet he was conscious of a perfect sincerity in his desires and in his prayers. Suddenly he remembered that, when in a pure frame of mind, he had only considered the acceptance of the call. But in order to be guided aright, he must abandon himself entirely to God's directing. In all honesty of purpose, he began to think of the sermon he could deliver if he resolved to reject the call. Ah! that sermon needed but little meditation. With such a decision to announce, he felt that he could carry his hearers with him to heights of which they knew nothing. Their very vulgarity and sordidness of nature would help instead of hindering him. No one in Kansas City would doubt for a moment the sincerity of the self-sacrifice involved in rejecting ten thousand dollars a year for five. That sermon could be preached with effect from any text. "Feed my sheep" even would do. He thrilled in anticipation, as a great actor thrills when reading a part which will allow him to discover all his powers, and in which he is certain to "bring down the house." Completely carried away by his emotions, he began to turn the sermon over in his head. First of all he sought for a text; not this one, nor that one, but a few words breathing the very spirit of Christ's self-abnegation. He soon found what he wanted: "For whosoever will save his life, shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for My sake, shall find it." The unearthly beauty of the thought and the divine simplicity of its expression took the orator captive. As he imagined that Godlike Figure in Galilee, and seemed to hear the words drop like pearls from His lips, so he saw himself in the pulpit, and had a foretaste of the effect of his own eloquence. Ravished by the vision, he proceeded to write and rewrite the peroration. Every other part he could trust to his own powers, and to the inspiration of the theme, but the peroration he meant to make finer even than his apostrophe on the cultivation of character, which hitherto had been the high-water mark of his achievement.

At length he finished his task, but not before sunset, and he felt weary and hungry. He ate and rested. In the complete relaxation of mental strain, he understood all at once what he had done. He had decided to remain in Kansas City. But to remain meant to meet Mrs. Hooper day after day, to be thrown together with her even by her foolishly confiding husband; it meant perpetual temptation, and at last--a fall! And yet God had guided him to choose that sermon rather than the other. He had abandoned himself passively to His guidance--could *that* lead to the brink of the pit?... He cried out suddenly like one in bodily anguish. He had found the explanation. God cared for no half-victories. Flight to Chicago must seem to Him the veriest cowardice. God intended him to stay in Kansas City and conquer the awful temptation face to face. When he realized this, he fell on his knees and prayed as he had never prayed in all his life before. If entreated humbly, God would surely temper the wind to the shorn lamb; He knew His servant's weakness. "*Lead us not into temptation,*" he cried again and again, for the first time in his life comprehending what now seemed to him the awful significance of the words. "*Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil!*"--thus he begged and wept. But even when, exhausted in body and in mind, he rose from his knees, he had found no comfort. Like a child,

with streaming eyes and quivering features, he stumbled upstairs to bed and fell asleep, repeating over and over again mechanically the prayer that the cup might pass from him.

On the Saturday morning he awoke as from a hideous nightmare. Before there was time for thought he was aware of what oppressed and frightened him. The knowledge of his terrible position weighed him down. He was worn out and feverishly ill; incapable of reflection or resolution, conscious chiefly of pain and weariness, and a deep dumb revolt against his impending condemnation. After lying thus for some time, drinking the cup of bitterness to the very dregs, he got up, and went downstairs. Yielding to habit he opened the Bible. But the Book had no message for him. His tired brain refused, for minutes together, to take in the sense of the printed words. The servant found him utterly miserable and helpless when she went to tell him that "the dinner was a-gittin' cold."

The food seemed to restore him, and during the first two hours of digestion he was comparatively peaceful in being able to live without thinking; but when the body had recovered its vigour, the mind grew active, and the self-torture recommenced. For some hours--he never knew how many--he suffered in this way; then a strange calm fell upon him. Was it the Divine help which had come at last, or despair, or the fatigue of an overwrought spirit? He knelt down and prayed once more, but this time his prayer consisted simply in placing before his Heavenly Father the exact state of the case. He was powerless; God should do with him according to His purpose, only he felt unable to resist if the temptation came up against him. Jesus, of course, could remove the temptation or strengthen him if He so willed. His servant was in His hands.

After continuing in this strain for some time he got up slowly, calm but hopeless. There was no way of escape for him. He took up the Bible and attempted again to read it; but of a sudden he put it down, and throwing his outspread arms on the table and bowing his head upon them he cried:

"My God, forgive me! I cannot hear Thy voice, nor feel Thy presence. I can only see her face and feel her body."

And then hardened as by the consciousness of unforgivable blaspheming, he rose with set face, lit his candle, and went to bed.

The week had passed much as usual with Mrs. Hooper and her husband. On the Tuesday he had seen most of his brother Deacons and found that they thought as he did. All were agreed that something should be done to testify to their gratitude, if indeed their pastor refused the "call." In the evening, after supper, Mr. Hooper narrated to his wife all that he had done and all that the others had said. When he asked for her opinion she approved of his efforts. A little while later she turned to him: "I wonder why Mr. Letgood doesn't marry?" As she spoke she laid down her work. With a tender smile the Deacon drew her on to his knees in the armchair, and pushing up his spectacles (he had been reading a dissertation on the meaning of the Greek verb said with infinite, playful tenderness in his voice:

"Tain't every one can find a wife like you, my dear." He was rewarded for the flattering phrase with a little slap on the cheek. He continued thoughtfully: "Taint every one either that wants to take care of a wife. Some folks hain't got much affection in 'em, I guess; perhaps Mr. Letgood hain't." To the which Mrs. Hooper answered not in words, but her lips curved into what might be called a smile, a contented smile as from the heights of superior knowledge.

Mr. Letgood's state of mind on the Sunday morning was too complex for complete analysis: he did not attempt the task. He preferred to believe that he had told God the whole truth without any attempt at reservation. He had thereby placed himself in His hands, and was no longer chiefly responsible. He would not even think of what he was about to do, further than that he intended to refuse the call and to preach the sermon the peroration of which he had so carefully prepared. After dressing he sat down in his study and committed this passage to memory. He pictured to himself with pleasure the effect it would surely produce upon his hearers. When Pete came to tell him the buggy was ready to take him to church, he got up almost cheerfully, and went out.

The weather was delightful, as it is in June in that part of the Western States. From midday until about four o'clock the temperature is that of midsummer, but the air is exceedingly dry and light, and one breathes it in the morning with a sense of exhilaration. While driving to church Mr. Letgood's spirits rose. He chatted with his servant Pete, and even took the reins once for a few hundred yards. But when they neared the church his gaiety forsook him. He stopped talking, and appeared to be a little preoccupied. From time to time he courteously greeted one of his flock on the sidewalk: but that was all. As he reached the church, the Partons drove up, and of course he had to speak to them. After the usual conventional remarks and shaking of hands, the minister turned up the sidewalk which led to the vestry. He had not taken more than four or five steps in this direction before he paused and looked up the street. He shrugged his shoulders, however, immediately at his own folly, and walked on: "Of course she couldn't send a messenger with a note. On Sundays the Deacon was with her."

As he opened the vestry door, and stepped into the little room, he stopped short. Mrs. Hooper was there, coming towards him with outstretched hand and radiant smile:

"Good morning Mr. Letgood, all the Deacons are here to meet you, and they let me come; because I was the first you told the news to, and because I'm sure you're not goin' to leave us. Besides, I wanted to come."

He could not help looking at her for a second as he took her hand and bowed:

"Thank you, Mrs. Hooper." Not trusting himself further, he began to shake hands with the assembled elders. In answer to one who expressed the hope that they would keep him, he said slowly and gravely:

"I always trust something to the inspiration of the moment, but I confess I am greatly moved to refuse this call."

"That's what I said," broke in Mr. Hooper triumphantly, "and I said, too, there were mighty few like you, and I meant it. But we don't want you to act against yourself, though we'd be mighty glad to hev you stay."

A chorus of "Yes, sir! Yes, indeed! That's so" went round the room in warm approval, and then, as the minister did not answer save with an abstracted, wintry smile, the Deacons began to file into the church. Curiously enough Mrs. Hooper having moved away from the door during this scene was now, necessarily it seemed, the last to leave the room. While she was passing him, Mr. Letgood bent towards her and in an eager tone whispered:

"And my answer?"

Mrs. Hooper paused, as if surprised.

"Oh! ain't you men stupid," she murmured and with a smile tossed the question over her shoulder: "What *did* I come here for?"

That sermon of Mr. Letgood's is still remembered in Kansas City. It is not too much to say that the majority of his hearers believed him to be inspired. And, in truth, as an artistic performance his discourse was admirable. After standing for some moments with his hand upon the desk, apparently lost in thought, he began in the quietest tone to read the letter from the Deacons of the Second Baptist Church in Chicago. He then read his reply, begging them to give him time to consider their request He had considered it--prayerfully. He would read the passage of Holy Scripture which had suggested the answer he was about to send to the call. He paused again. The rustling of frocks and the occasional coughings ceased--the audience straining to catch the decision--while in a higher key he recited the verse, "For whosoever will save his life, shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for My sake, shall find it."

As the violinist knows when his instrument is perfectly attuned, so Mr. Letgood knew when he repeated the text that his hearers had surrendered themselves to him to be played upon. It would be useless here to reproduce the sermon, which lasted for nearly an hour, and altogether impossible to give any account of the preacher's gestures or dramatic pauses, or of the modulations and inflections of his voice, which now seemed to be freighted with passionate earnestness, now quivered in pathetic appeal, and now grew musical in the dying fall of some poetic phrase. The effect was astonishing. While he was speaking simply of the text as embodying the very spirit of the Glad Tidings which Christ first delivered to the world, not a few women were quietly weeping. It was impossible, they felt, to listen unmoved to that voice.

But when he went on to show the necessity of renunciation as the first step towards the perfecting of character, even the hard, keen faces of the men before him began to relax and change expression. He dwelt, in turn, upon the startling novelty of Christ's teaching and its singular success. He spoke of the shortness of human life, the vanity of human effort, and the ultimate reward of those who sacrifice themselves for others, as Jesus did, and out of the same divine spirit of love. He thus came to the peroration. He began it in the manner of serious conversation.

All over the United States the besetting sin of the people was the desire of wealth. He traced the effects of the ignoble struggle for gain in the degradation of character, in the debased tone of public and private life. The main current of existence being defiled, his duty was clear. Even more than other men he was pledged to resist the evil tendency of the time. In some ways, no doubt, he was as frail and faulty as the weakest of his hearers, but to fail in this respect would be, he thought, to prove himself unworthy of his position. That a servant of Christ in the nineteenth century should seek wealth, or allow it in any way to influence his conduct, appeared to him to be much the same unpardonable sin as cowardice in a soldier or dishonesty in a man of business. He could do but little to show what the words of his text meant to him, but one thing he could do and would do joyously. He would write to the good Deacons in Chicago to tell them that he intended to stay in Kansas City, and to labour on among the people whom he knew and loved, and some of whom, he believed, knew and loved him. He would not be tempted by the greater position offered to him or by the larger salary. "*For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for My sake, shall find it.*"

As his voice broke over the last words, there was scarcely a dry eye in the church. Many of the women were sobbing audibly, and Mrs. Hooper had long ago given up the attempt "to pull her tears down the back way." She expressed the general sentiment of her sex when she said afterwards, "It was just too lovely for anythin'." And the men were scarcely less affected, though they were better able to control their emotion. The joyous renunciation of five thousand dollars a year struck these hard men of business as something almost uncanny. They would have considered it the acme of folly in an ordinary man, but in a preacher they felt vaguely that it was admirable.

When Deacon Hooper met his brother Deacons before the platform where the collection-plates were kept, he whispered, "The meetin' is at my house at three o'clock. Be on time." His tone was decided, as were also the nods which accepted the invitation.

After the service Mr. Letgood withdrew quietly without going, as usual, amongst his congregation. This pleased

even Mrs. Farton, whose husband was a judge of the Supreme Court. She said: "It was elegant of him."

Mr. Hooper received the twelve Deacons in his drawing-room, and when the latest comer was seated, began:

"There ain't no need for me to tell you, brethren, why I asked you all to come round here this afternoon. After that sermon this mornin' I guess we're all sot upon showin' our minister that we appreciate him. There are mighty few men with five thousand dollars a year who'd give up ten thousand. It seems to me a pretty good proof that a man's a Christian ef he'll do that. Tain't being merely a Christian: it's Christ-like. We must keep Mr. Letgood right here: he's the sort o' man we want. If they come from Chicago after him now, they'll be comin' from New York next, an' he oughtn't to be exposed to sich great temptation.

"I allow that we'll be able to raise the pew-rents from the first of January next, to bring in another two thousand five hundred dollars a year, and I propose that we Deacons should jest put our hands deep down in our pockets and give Mr. Let-good that much anyway for this year, and promise the same for the future. I'm willin', as senior Deacon, though not the richest, to start the list with three hundred dollars."

In five minutes the money was subscribed, and it was agreed that each man should pay in his contribution to the name of Mr. Hooper at the First National Bank next day; Mr. Hooper could then draw his cheque for the sum.

"Wall," said the Deacon, again getting up, "that's settled, but I've drawn that cheque already. Mrs. Hooper and me talked the thing over," he added half apologetically, and as if to explain his unbusinesslike rashness; "an' she thinks we oughter go right now to Mr. Letgood as a sort of surprise party an' tell him what we hev decided--that is, ef you're all agreed."

They were, although one or two objected to a "surprise party" being held on Sunday. But Deacon Hooper overruled the objection by saying that he could find no better *word*, though of course 'twas really not a "surprise party." After this explanation, some one proposed that Deacon Hooper should make the presentation, and that Mrs. Hooper should be asked to accompany them. When Mr. Hooper went into the dining-room to find, his wife she was already dressed to go out, and when he expressed surprise and delivered himself of his mission, she said simply:

"Why, I only dressed to go and see Mrs. Jones, who's ill, but I guess I'll go along with you first."

The same afternoon Mr. Letgood was seated in his study considering a sermon for the evening--it would have to be very different from that of the morning, he felt, or else it would fall flat.

He still avoided thinking of his position. The die was cast now, and having struggled hard against the temptation he tried to believe that he was not chiefly responsible. In the back of his mind was the knowledge that his responsibility would become clear to him some time or other, but he confined it in the furthest chamber of his brain with repentance as the guardian.

He had just decided that his evening address must be doctrinal and argumentative, when he became aware of steps in the drawing-room. Opening the door he found himself face to face with his Deacons. Before he could speak, Deacon Hooper began:

"Mr. Letgood! We, the Deacons of your church, hev come to see you. We want to tell you how we appreciate your decision this mornin'. It was Christlike! And we're all proud of you, an' glad you're goin' to stay with us. But we allow that it ain't fair or to be expected that you should refuse ten thousand dollars a year with only five. So we've made a purse for this year among ourselves of two thousand five hundred dollars extry, which we hope you'll accept. Next year the pew-rents can be raised to bring in the same sum; anyway, it shall be made up.

"There ain't no use in talkin'; but you, sir, hev jest sot us an example of how one who loves the Lord Jesus, and Him only, should act, and we ain't goin' to remain far behind. No, sir, we ain't Thar's the cheque."

As he finished speaking, tears stood in the kind, honest, blue eyes.

Mr. Letgood took the cheque mechanically, and mechanically accepted at the same time the Deacon's outstretched hand; but his eyes sought Mrs. Hooper's, who stood behind the knot of men with her handkerchief to her face. In a moment or two, recalled to himself by the fact that one after the other all the Deacons wanted to shake his hand, he tried to sustain his part in the ceremony. He said:

"My dear brothers, I thank you each and all, and accept your gift in the spirit in which you offer it. I need not say that I knew nothing of your intention when I preached this morning. It is not the money that I'm thinking of now, but your kindness. I thank you again."

After a few minutes' casual conversation, consisting chiefly of praise of the "wonderful discourse" of the morning, Mr. Letgood proposed that they should all have iced coffee with him; there was nothing so refreshing; he wanted them to try it; and though he was a bachelor, if Mrs. Hooper would kindly give her assistance and help him with his cook, he was sure they would enjoy a glass. With a smile she consented. Stepping into the passage after her and closing the door, he said hurriedly, with anger and suspicion in his voice:

"You didn't get this up as my answer? You didn't think I'd take money instead, did you?"

Demurely, Mrs. Hooper turned her head round as he spoke, and leaning against him while he put his arms round her

waist, answered with arch reproach:

"You are just too silly for anythin'!"

Then, with something like the movement of a cat loath to lose the contact of the caressing hand, she turned completely towards him and slowly lifted her eyes. Their lips met.

21 April. 1891.