

Sir Archibald had placed a chair for me, but I took no notice of it, except to say, "I'm surprised that you don't offer *me* a seat on the table."

We left the room at once, and I spoke to Cecilia with some severity, saying that I could never countenance such on-goings, and that Miss Pomeroy was leading her all wrong. "If she is determined to marry a baronet," I said, "let her do it; but even an American might think it more necessary that a baronet should be determined to marry her, and might shrink from such a form of pursuit. Well, if you are determined to laugh at me," I went on, "there must be some other arrangement between us, but you cannot leave me at present, alone on a hillside like this, just after influenza, amongst herds of wild ponies."

Cecilia cried at last, and upset me so much that I had another bad night, suffering much from my knee, and obliged to have a cup of cocoa at 2.30 A. M. Cecilia appeared half

asleep as she made it, although the day before she could spring out of bed the moment the light came in, to look at the sunrise. These so-called poetic natures are very puzzling and inconsistent.



Sir Archibald Maxwell Mackenzie

THERE is no doubt, alas! that the weather is improving and that we shall soon be in for that picnic. I have promised the motor and promised my society. There is something about that girl which makes me feel and act in a way I hardly think is quite normal. She forces me to do things I don't want to do, and the things don't seem so bad in themselves, at least as long as she is there. The artist I saw at Exeter has turned up here, the one who comes to look at the gorse; at any rate he makes a man to speak to, which is a merciful variety. He talks a lot of rot of course, — raves about the "blue distance" here, as if it mattered what colour the distance is. But I think he is off his chump in other ways besides; for instance, he was saying to-day he was sick of landscape and pining to try his hand at a portrait.

"There's your model all ready," said I,

indicating Miss Virginia, all in white, with a scarlet parasol, looking as pretty as a rose.

"Bah!" says the artist, "who wants to paint 'the young person' whose eyes show you a blank past, a delightful present, and a prosperous future! Eyes that have cried are the only ones to paint. I should prefer the old lady's companion."

I felt positively disgusted at this, but of course there is no accounting for tastes, and if a man is as blind as a bat, he can't help it; only I wonder he elects to gain his livelihood as an artist.

I walked with Miss Virginia to-day down to the little village about a mile away. It was all through the lanes, and I could hardly get her along because of the flowers. The banks were certainly quite blue with violets, and Miss Virginia would pick them, though I explained it was waste of time, for they would all be dead in half an hour and have to be thrown away.

"But if I make up a nice little bunch for



your buttonhole," said she, "will that be waste of time?" Of course I was obliged to say "No," — you have to tell such lies to women, one of the reasons I dislike their society.

"But of course you will throw them away as soon as they are faded, poor dears!" continued Miss Virginia.

I did n't see what else a sensible man could do with decaying vegetation, though it was plain that this was not what she expected me to say. Luckily, the village came in sight at this moment, so I was able to change the subject.

Miss Virginia seems very keen on villages, and went on about the thatched cottages and the church tower and the lich-gate in such a way that I conclude they don't have these things in America, where people are really up to date. It was in vain for me to tell her that thatch is earwiggy as well as damp, and that every sensible landowner is substituting slate roofs as fast as he can. We went into

the church, which was as cold and dark as a vault, and Miss Virginia was intensely pleased with that too, and I could hardly get her away. In the mean time, the sun had come out tremendously strong, and as it had rained for some days previously, the whole place was steaming like a cauldron, and we both suddenly felt most awfully slack.

"Let's take a bite here," I suggested. "There is sure to be a pothouse of sorts, and we shall be late for the hotel luncheon anyway."

The idea seemed to please Miss Virginia, and we hunted for the pothouse and found it in a corner.

"Oh, what a dear little inn!" cried she. "I shall love anything they serve here!"

I was thinking of the luncheon, not the inn, myself, and did not expect great things from the look of the place, which was low and poky, with thatched eaves and windows all buried in clematis and ivy. A little cobbled path led up to the door, with lots of



wallflower growing in the crannies of the wall on each side. There was nobody but a lass to attend to us, and she gave us bread and cheese, and clouted cream and plum jam. It was n't bad. Virginia talked ten to the dozen all the time, and the funny thing was, she made me talk, too. For the first time in my life I felt that it might not be a bad thing to be friends with a girl as you can be with a man, but such a thing is not possible, of course. After a while Virginia went off to make friends with the landlady and pick flowers in the garden. How beastly dingy and dark the inn parlour seemed then, when I had time to look about! I felt, all of a sudden, most tremendously down on my luck. Why? I have had these fits of the blues lately; I think it must be the Devonshire cream; I must stop it.

We got home all right. I carried all Miss Virginia's flowers which the old woman had given her, — about a stack of daffodils, lilies, and clematis.

Cecilia Evesham

*Sunday evening*

I BEGIN to think I am what is called a psychological person, for I woke this morning with a strong presentiment of things happening or about to happen. The day did not seem to lend itself to events; it had broken with rain lashing the window panes and a gale of wind blowing through every crevice of the hotel. Mrs. MacGill did not feel able to rise for breakfast. As a matter of fact she was more able to do so than I was, but she did n't think so, which settled the matter. Therefore I went down to the breakfast-room alone.

If the outer air was dreary, the scene indoors was very cheerful. A large fire blazed in the grate, and in front of the rain-lashed windows a table was laid for three. Virginia and Sir Archibald were already seated at it, and he rose, as I came in, and showed me that my place was with them.



"We felt sure that Mrs. MacGill would not appear this morning," he said, "so we thought we might all breakfast together."

What a gay little meal that was! Virginia was at her brightest; she would have made an owl laugh. I found myself forgetting headache and unhappiness, as I listened to her; and as for Sir Archibald, he seemed another man altogether from the rigid young Scotchman of our first acquaintance.

"Well, now, Sir Archibald," said Virginia, as she rose from the table, "the question is what a well brought up young man like you is going to do with himself all this wet day. I know what we are to be about, Miss Evesham and I,— we are going to look at all my new Paris gowns, and try on all my best hats."

"There's always the motor," he said.

Virginia had none of that way of hanging about with young men that English girls have. There could be no doubt that she was interested in Sir Archibald, and wished him

to be interested in her, but apparently for that very reason she would not let him see too much of her that morning. She carried me off to her room, and kept me there so long, looking at her clothes, that Mrs. MacGill found sharp fault with me when at last I returned to her. What had I been doing? I might have known that she would want me, etc.; she had decided not to get up until tea time. "It is impossible to go to church, and it is much easier to employ one's time well in bed," she said. So in bed she remained, and I in attendance upon her until it was time for luncheon.

When I went downstairs, Virginia had also appeared again, and I saw the wisdom and skill of her tactics; she was far more pleasing to the young man now, because he had seen nothing of her all morning, and she knew it. Sir Archibald, it appeared, had passed his time in the motor-shed, presumably either examining the machinery of the motor or polishing it up. Virginia seemed



to have been writing letters; she brought a bundle of them down with her, and laid one, address uppermost, on the table beside her. It was addressed to "Breckenridge Calhoun, Esq., Richmond, Virginia, U. S. A."

I saw Sir Archibald's eyes rest on it for a second, but the moment he realized the name he almost consciously averted his glance from the envelope for the remainder of the meal.

Virginia was very lively.

"Well, now, Sir Archibald, I'm going to hear you your catechism after lunch; it's a good occupation for Sunday afternoon," she said. "You'll come right into the coffee-room, and recite it to me, and Miss Evesham shall correct your mistakes."

"I'll try to acquit myself well," he answered, following her meekly into the coffee-room.

"What is your name?" she began.

"Archibald George," he replied, and Virginia went on:—

"I'll invent the rest of the questions, I

think, so please answer them well. How old are you?"

"Thirty-one years and two months."

"Have you any profession?"

"None."

"Pursuits?"

"Various."

"Name these."

"Motoring, bicycling, shooting, fishing."

"That will do; you may sit down," observed Virginia gravely, and then, turning to me, "I think the young man has acquitted himself very creditably in this difficult exam. Miss Evesham, shall we give him a certificate?"

"Yes," I replied, laughing at her nonsense. Virginia wrote out on a sheet of paper:—

This is to certify that Sir Archibald Maxwell Mackenzie passed a creditable examination in Pedigree and Pursuits.

(Signed) VIRGINIA S. POMEROY.



"Here," she said, folding it up and giving it to the young man, "you should keep this among the proudest archives of your house."

Sir Archibald put it into his pocket with a funny little smile. "It shall have the greatest care, always," he assured her. "And now, Miss Pomeroy, won't you and Miss Evesham come and have a game of billiards with me? I must relax my mind after all this effort."

I knew that I should not consent to this proposition; Virginia knew that she should not; we both hesitated for a moment, and then Virginia, with a glance at the storm outside, made a compromise in favor of decorum.

"Well, there does n't seem to be much else to do this wet afternoon," she said. "I don't care if I do come and see how well you play, Sir Archibald, and perhaps Miss Evesham will come and applaud also."

I did n't see much difference between

playing ourselves and seeing him play, but perhaps there was a little.

"I'll fetch my banjo," proposed Virginia, "and I can sing while you have your game."

So to the billiard-room we went, and Virginia perched herself in a window niche. From this point of vantage she watched Sir Archibald's strokes, while she strummed away on the instrument, and sang delicious little songs in her clear, bird-like voice. I watched them both closely. Sir Archibald was not attending to his play; I saw that he was thinking far more about her.

"Won't you even chalk my cue for me?" he asked her, holding out the chalk.

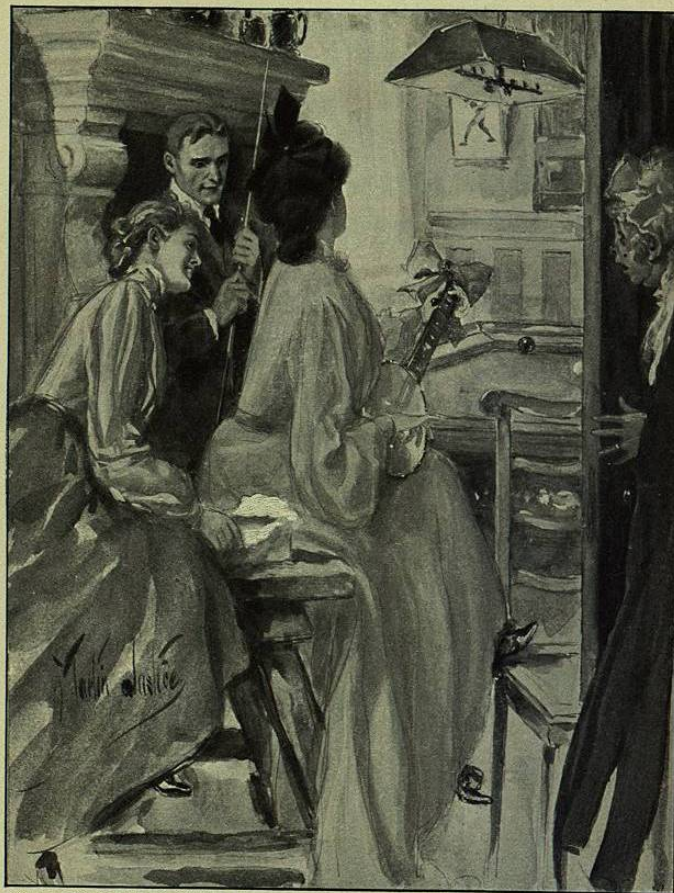
She received it daintily between her finger and thumb. He stood beside us, looking down at her in the unmistakable way; he was falling in love, but he scarcely knew it.

"There's your nasty chalk! See, I've whited all my sleeve," she said, making a distracting little grimace. She held out her sleeve for him to see, and of course he



brushed the chalk gently off it, and looked into her eyes for a moment. I almost felt myself in the way, but I knew that I was necessary to them just then. They had not advanced far enough in their flirtation to be left alone yet, so I contented myself. They both, I thought, were taking me into their confidence. "You understand — you won't betray us — we mean no harm," they seemed to say to me; and I determined that this should be my attitude. I would play gooseberry obligingly for just so long as I was wanted, and when the right moment came, would equally obligingly leave them.

The afternoon went merrily on. Sir Archibald sent for a whiskey and soda, and Virginia fetched a huge box of French bonbons, and we refreshed ourselves according to our tastes. Virginia had just slipped a very large piece of nougat into her mouth, and I was just going to put a bit into mine, but happily had n't done so, when the door opened, and Mrs. MacGill came walking in,



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THE DOOR OPENED, AND MRS. MACGILL CAME WALKING IN



with an air of angry bewilderment on her face. A billiard cue to her means nothing but dissipation, a whiskey and soda nothing short of sodden drunkenness, so the whole scene appeared to her a sort of wild orgy. If she had only known how innocent it all was!

"Cecilia," she exclaimed, "the waiter told me that you were here, but I could scarcely believe him!"

I affected not to see that she was shocked.

"I dare say it is nearly tea time," I said. "Shall we go into the dining-room?"

Mrs. MacGill had a right to be angry with me, but I do not think any indiscretion could deserve the torrent of stupid upbraiding that fell upon me now. Many of her reproaches were deserved. I was too old to have given countenance to this afternoon in the billiard-room; I should have known better.

But when all is said and done, life is short; short, and for most of us disappointing. We cannot afford to put a bar across the