

THE SONG OF A SILLY OPTIMIST.

I'm just a silly optimist with cheerfulness galore,
For I'm tired of hearing people say that
everything's a bore,
I'm tired of melancholy moans, and so I
point with pride
To the awe-inspiring axiom that I am sat-
isfied.

If there's nothing I love to eat, it's food,
If there's anything I love to wear, it's
clothes,
And in times of relaxation
I have proved by demonstration
That there's nothing quite so restful as
repose.

Let, Ibsen, Tolstoy, Schopenhauer depict
our life as dark,
But I cannot help believing that existence
is a lark,
That all the crimes and meannesses that
in this world are done
Are committed in a spirit of exuberance
and fun.

And there's nothing that I love to talk
like words,
And there's nothing that I love to sing
like songs;
So I find a life employment
In the pleasures of enjoyment,
Placing sadness in the sphere where it
belongs.

—W. L., in *Life*.

VAL WARYNG'S MISTAKE

By Florence E. Eastwick.

GIRL sat with her hands clasped round her knees, staring out of the window with unseeing eyes—her thoughts far away. Behind her the room was almost dark, but a rosy glow slanted through the low casement and touched her bright brown hair into threads of gold. A man coming swiftly into the room hesitated for a moment in the doorway, then, with a whimsical expression of amusement in his eyes, went forward softly, and, putting a hand under her chin, kissed her upturned face. But, as his lips touched hers, he recoiled with a start; her face was unknown to him, and at the same moment the girl sprang from her seat, thrusting him from her with both hands. The color swept from her throat to her forehead, her blue eyes blazed, her slender figure was tense with indignation.

"How dare you!" she said, passionately; and he, for a moment, had no reply ready. He was completely taken aback, but managed at last to stammer out:

"I'm very sorry. I'm afraid I've made a mistake."

"That you certainly have!" was the emphatic retort, and then, with a flash of scorn from the blue eyes, she was gone.

"Just my bad luck!" Val Waryng muttered. It certainly seemed unlucky that, after five years absence, he should manage to make a fauxpas on the moment of arriving home.

"Val, my dear boy!" a voice said from the doorway, and his mother came toward him with outstretched hands. He took her in his arms and she drew his head down and kissed him on both cheeks. Then she held him away from her and scrutinized his face. "You've grown a beard, Val!" she said, reproachfully. "It makes you look dreadfully old."

He laughed.

"I knew you wouldn't like it, and I meant to take it off before seeing you, but we reached port sooner than we expected, and I rushed to catch the midday express."

"Ah, that is how you came to-day instead of to-morrow, when we expected you. You are very welcome, my dear boy, but it's so dark I cannot see you properly; we'll have a light."

As the match flared, he noticed that her face was thinner and more transparent in its fair delicacy of complexion than when he went away; so small and fragile a being, and yet possessed of great strength of will, as he knew to his cost—witness his banishment to a far land when the headstrong follies of his youth had threatened his future career.

"I am sorry to tell you there is a disappointment in store for you, Val," she said, when the gas was lighted. "Gladys has gone away; she left here yesterday to stay with some relations. She gave me this note for you. I think she might really have postponed her visit when she heard you were coming home, but Gladys is so different from other girls."

"Yes, Gladys is quite different from other girls," he repeated, with a slightly cynical infection in his voice. He was turning the letter round and round in his hands absently; then he added: "Who was the girl I found sitting here? I thought for a moment she was Gladys when I came in."

"The girl? Oh, you mean Francis! Why, surely you could not mistake her for Gladys; they are utterly unlike; I told you all about her long ago, Val—don't you remember? She was betrothed to my care by my cousin, Miriam Vane, when she died two years ago, and Francis has lived with me ever since."

"Oh, but you said a child! I imagined quite a little girl, not a tall, young woman like this. I'm afraid I offended her when I arrived."

"Did she run away? She is rather shy, but a dear girl. She has been a great comfort to me in my loneliness; but you want to read your letter, Val!"

He tore open the envelope, and, going over to the light, stood there reading. The expression on his face deepened suddenly to gravity, and a line appeared between his eyebrows which made him look strangely like his mother. She was watching him anxiously while he tore the paper into small pieces and threw them into the grate. Meeting her eyes, he gave a low laugh.

"So that is over!" he said.

"Oh, Val, you don't mean—"

"Yes—she has politely, but firmly, ended our engagement. It is only what I have been expecting for a long time. Don't worry yourself, mother—I shall survive this, as I have survived other disappointments."

"She might have waited a little—to spoil your home-coming was most cruel

thought I had a right to kiss—though that, as it happens, was another mistake," he added, bitterly.

"She looked at him intently, and he felt sure that she knew the other side of the story—the side taken by Gladys, whatever it might be. When he questioned Francis, she admitted that Gladys had told her something—that they were "not suited to each other."

"And that it was my fault?" he interjected.

She did not reply, but throwing the last handful from her basket, turned toward the house. He walked by her side meditating, wondering what her thought about him might be. Could he have read them, he would have discovered some confusion in Francis's mind. The description given by Gladys Harcourt of her dare-devil lover, who had won her consent to an engagement more by the impetuosity of his love-making after a week's acquaintance than by anything else, did not accord quite with the bearded man of grave demeanor and quiet speech walking beside her. Possibly his mother had declared him to have been the handsomest and most attractive boy in the world, who would certainly have been spoiled by her women friends if she had not rescued him by sheer force of will from their too pronounced encouragement.

Francis had imagined a good-looking, conceited young man who took for granted that every girl must be ready to fall in love with him at first sight—an opinion which his method of introducing himself to her seemed to have justified.

Of his good looks there could be no doubt, but the night before, while she had sat listening to him, she discerned in his conversation only a frank and outspoken love for his mother, and a natural exhilaration at finding himself once more at home. She began to think she had judged him hardly; her severity relaxed, and, when they reached the house, they were on excellent terms.

Fate and Mrs. Waryng together conspired to further their intimacy. Val's mother had a neuralgic attack and remained in her room, so to Francis fell the task of entertaining the young man. They breakfasted together, then went round the gardens, stables and paddock. She knew every creature in the barnyard, and they knew her—dogs, cats, horses, not excluding the pigs and the inhabitants of the poultry yard—all came hurrying to greet her at the sound of her voice; she seemed like a fairy princess in her own little world.

They lunched together, and then, at Mrs. Waryng's request, Francis took Val for a drive in her dogcart. He was interested in seeing all his old haunts again, but evinced no desire to pay any calls on former friends.

"There will be plenty of time later to look up the natives—just now I feel a bit off!" he told her, and she understood his words bore some reference to the fickle Gladys.

After dinner he fetched a portfolio of snapshots, to show her the strange places he had visited in his travels. Among them was a photograph of his former fiancée, taken at the time of his departure from home. He took it up and gazed hard at the cold and discontented beauty of the face; then he looked at Francis. How different was her fresh and natural charm from that other—who, although five years his senior, had enchained his boyish heart. He laid the picture aside, and with it went all regret.

The days slipped into weeks, and one afternoon Val found the girl in her favorite seat near the window; she was reading a letter, and he recognized the writing.

"You have heard from Gladys?" he said, as he sat down beside her.

"Yes. She is in a hospital, training to be a nurse," Francis answered.

"She is well—and happy?" he queried.

"She says she is both; that she has at last found her vocation, and never knew before what it was to be content with life."

As he sat silent, looking out of the window, she murmured:

"Are you sorry, Val?" she asked, quietly.

He turned and looked at her.

"Have I seemed as if I were sorry, here with you? You might help me to be very glad."

Meeting his eyes, she began to understand.

He laid his hand on hers and asked: "Do you remember our first meeting, Francis? What were you thinking about then, when I found you here?"

"I was thinking—well, I was thinking what you would be like!"

Her eyes drooped—and then he also understood.—*New York Weekly*.

A Compromising Captain.

John D. Crimmins, in the *New York Times*, tells of a party that hired a boat owned by a man at Atlantic City who takes out sailing parties for a consideration. A number of young ladies were of the party.

About a mile and a half out from the Inlet the wind freshened most unexpectedly and there was trouble. For a while it looked as if the dinky little catboat would capsize. The girls were considerably wrought up and gave expression to their fears in no uncertain manner.

"See here, young ladies," said the owner of the craft, just as one of the passengers let out an awful shriek, "you seem to forget that if she goes down I'm the chap that loses most. She's my boat."

Fishy.

Mother (reproachfully, to her small son)—"Jamie, where have you been all afternoon?" Jamie (uneasily)—"At Sunday-school, mamma." Mother—"Then how is it you are wet and smell so of fish?" Jamie (in desperation)—"Well, you see, I've been studying about Jonah and the whale, and—well—I guess it came off on my clothes."—*Harper's Weekly*.

Pluck and Adventure.

THROUGH AFRICAN SWAMPS.

IN Harper's Magazine, Henry W. Nevins, who is now in the interior of Africa investigating the slave-trade for the magazine, tells of a trip through the deadly swamp country after leaving the coast:

"Hearing that only a few miles away there was real solid ground where strange beasts roamed," says Mr. Nevins, "I determined to cut a path through the forest in that direction. Engaging two powerful savages armed with 'matchets,' or short heavy swords, I took the plunge from a wharf which had been built with piles beside a river. At the first step I was up to my knees in black sludge, the smell of which had been accumulating since the glacial period. Perhaps the swamps are forming the coal-beds of a remote future; but in that case I am glad that I did not live in Newcastle in the remote past. As in a coronation ode, there seemed no limit to the depths of sinking. One's only chance was to strike a submerged trunk not yet rotten enough to count as mud. Sometimes it was possible to cling to the stems of branches of standing trees, and swing over the slime without sinking deep. It was possible, but unpleasant; for stems and branches and twigs and fibres were generally covered with every variety of spine and spike and hook.

"In a quarter of an hour we were as much cut off from the world as on the central ocean. The air was dark with shadow, though the tree-tops gleamed with sunshine far above our heads. Not a whisper of a breeze nor a smell of fresh air could reach us. We were stifled with the smell. The sweat poured from us in the intolerable heat. Around us, out of the black mire, rose the vast tree trunks, already rotting as they grew, and between the trunks was woven a thick curtain of spiky plants and of the long suckers by which the trees drew up an extra supply of water—very unnecessarily, one would have thought.

"Through this undergrowth the natives, themselves often up to the middle in slime, slowly hacked away. They are always very patient of a white man's insanity. Now and then we came to a little clearing where some big tree had fallen, rotten from bark to core. Or we came to a 'creek'—one of the innumerable little water-courses which intersect the forest and are the favorite haunt of the mudfish, whose eyes are prominent like a frog's, and whose side fins have almost developed into legs, so that with the help of their tails, they can run over the slime like lizards on the sand. But for them and the crocodiles and the innumerable hosts of ants and slugs, the lower depths of the mangrove swamp contains few living things. Parrots and monkeys inhabit the upper world where the sunlight reaches, and sometimes the deadly stillness is broken by the cry of a hawk that has the flight of an owl and fishes the creeks in the evening. Otherwise there is nothing but decay and stench and creatures of the ooze."

UNACKNOWLEDGED PRINCESS.

The life of Elizabeth Patterson, grandmother of Mr. Charles J. Bonaparte, the new Secretary of the Navy, was as full of romance as any novel. Brilliant as was its beginning, its halo of riches and royalty soon faded in the shadow of the clouds of disappointment and desertion. The love story of Jerome Bonaparte, brother of the great emperor, and his marriage to the belle of Baltimore are well known. Napoleon's rejection of his brother's bride and the separation of a husband and wife are matters of history. Through a long life Madame Bonaparte bore her troubles unflinchingly and was ever a woman of courage.

Prince Jerome Bonaparte was a young man who seldom denied himself anything which took his fancy. This characteristic was well displayed in the accounts which his brother was continually called upon to settle. One of these bills was for a magnificent shaving set valued at twenty thousand francs. Prince Jerome was only fifteen at the time he bought it, and showed not the sign of a beard. Napoleon indulged his brother in all his extravagances until it came to his marriage. Against that he absolutely set his face.

But the beautiful bride was undaunted, and urged her husband to take her to France. The prince put off the evil day as long as possible. At last he yielded against his better judgment, and the young couple sailed from Philadelphia. A terrific gale sent the vessel on to a sand-bank, and the lives of its passengers were in danger.

Madame Bonaparte showed no fear. She clambered on to the sloping deck and began to give orders to lower a boat. The captain was dumfounded.

"Pray, are you commanding this ship?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Madame Bonaparte, "if necessary."

"How do you propose reaching the boat?" asked the captain.

"You are to throw me in."

The captain meekly obeyed the determined young woman's orders. But in lowering her into the boat, his strength failed and she fell into the water. Her heavy silk pelisse weighed her down, but the sailors managed to pull her into the boat. Even her sudden plunge did not confuse her. "Where is Prince Jerome?" was her first question, and then she continued her orders. The boat made its way

to shore, and soon the young couple found shelter in a farmhouse, and made merry over their adventure.

As a sea trip the second voyage was more successful, although, as Prince Jerome wrote to his father-in-law in English, "Elizabeth is very seasick, but you know as well as anybody that seasickness never has killed anybody."

The voyage was over all too soon however, for with it ended Madame Bonaparte's happiness. Napoleon annulled the marriage. Jerome became King of Westphalia and married a princess of Wurtemberg.

CURIOUS FRIENDSHIPS.

Children and snakes appear to get on well together in Australia. A writer in Chambers' Magazine, who lives in Sydney, says he has never heard in the bush of a snake biting a child, nor do the children show any fear of snakes. The bigger the snake the greater the joy in getting near it, and the stronger the desire to play with it. The snake's bright eyes and sinuous motion probably charm. And snakes, even the most vicious, respect the confidence.

At Koondrook, a little settlement in Victoria, a woman heard her child, eighteen months old, laughing as if she was having great fun. The child was supposed to be asleep in bed. The mother went to the room and found the child scrambling over the bed after something she could not see. That happened several times. Once, however, the mother went in suddenly and heard something drop off the bed. Looking hurriedly under the bed she distinctly saw a large snake, that turned upon her with evident intention to fight. When the husband came home he pulled up the boards of the loor but there was no sign of the snake. Next day, however, snake and child were discovered lying together on the floor, the child asleep and the snake apparently so.

That night the husband tried a plan. He placed a candle on the floor, alongside the child, and asked his wife to play a slow air on the harmonium. Movements of the snake could be heard; but the rustle was all he vouchsafed. Next night the child was similarly posted, and the mother tried the effect of working her sewing machine. The sound was too tempting. The snake wriggled to the child with alacrity, and was promptly despatched by the father. It was a tiger-snake nearly five feet in length, and when killed was found by the child as an old acquaintance.

A WARNING SHOT.

One of the strange incidents of the war, especially during a state of siege, is the friendly relations which exist between enemies when off duty. At one moment the soldiers of the opposing armies will be chatting sociably and exchanging favors, the next—shooting each other down as deadly foes. A little incident told by Mr. Ripley in his "Story of Company F," gives a glimpse of a genial interlude in the grim Civil War.

During the siege of Petersburg, it was the custom of the opposing pickets to grant temporary truces for the purpose of preparing food. Half an hour perhaps, would be agreed upon, and its limit would be scrupulously observed when "time" was called. Then every man would hurry up to cover.

On one occasion a Confederate was slow to respond to the warning. He, to all appearances, did not realize that he was in sight. While the others hurried to their posts, he sat quietly blowing his coffee and munching his hardtack. Fortunately for him he was in plain sight of a sentinel less bloodthirsty than some. This man thought it only fair to give him farther warning.

"I say, Johnny," he shouted, "time's up! Git into your hole!"

"All right," replied Johnny, still blowing his coffee.

"Just hold that cup still a minute and I'll show you whether it's all right or not!" shouted the sharpshooter.

The Confederate began to suspect that he was in fact visible, and he held his cup still for an instant as he looked up and around. This afforded the desired opportunity for the sharpshooter. With a well-sent bullet he knocked the cup clean out of the owner's hand. With sudden agility the surprised Confederate made haste to disappear, amid the jeers and laughter of both lines of pickets.

GIANT WHALE TOWS STEAMER.

The whaling steamer Orion, which Captain Balcom and his associates are operating in connection with their modern station at Sechart, on the west coast of Victoria, British Columbia, figured in an exciting adventure last week, the outcome of which was for two hours in doubt, while a monster "sulphur bottom" whale, seventy-nine feet in length, towed the steamer seaward at better than fifteen knot speed. The whale had been harpooned in the ordinary manner, but was not killed, as usual, the bomb attached to the harpoon failing to explode at the critical instant. As the monster was only wounded and enraged there was nothing else to do but pay out line and play the big fish until it should become exhausted. For two hours the whale traveled seaward, towing the steamer. It kept under water the greater part of the time, coming up at quarter hour intervals to blow; and so hard did it pull that the blades of the harpoon loosened in its flesh.

The whale's pace grew steadily less, however, until it finally became very weak. The high speed at which it had traveled and the heavy drag of the steamer told, and the effect of the tow was intensified by reversing the ship's engines. Finally one of the ship's boats crept up on the whale and four hand lances were buried in its vitals.

15,000 ARE KILLED

Russian Riots Continue With Great Slaughtering

COVERS THE WHOLE COUNTRY

Business is Suffering Seriously From Strike in Russia—Letters All Censored—Attempt to Kill Prefect of Police at St. Petersburg—Soldiers Surround Hotel and Bring Up Artillery—Two Regiments of Cossacks Mutinied.

Moscow, By Cable.—Firing in the streets continued until midnight Wednesday night. The Governor General issued an appeal to the people, which is displayed in the streets, urging the citizens not to trust to the false interpretations given the recent manifesto and calling on them to give up the strike and take sides with the troops and the police in the preservation of order, resting on the assurance that the lawful authorities will know how to protect lives and property.

London, By Cable.—The St. Petersburg correspondent of The Times, in a dispatch dated December 26, says: "Governor General Doubasoff, telegraphing reports that 15,000 persons had been killed or wounded at Moscow.

"The latest news from Moscow says that the first regiment of Don Cossacks, Tveru dragoons and the Nevskich regiment of infantry mutined and are confined in their barracks.

"I am informed from a good source that 2,000 persons were killed and 10,000 wounded. The revolutionists are making no headway but they show up signs of exhaustion."

All over the city there are marks of the battle which has raged in the streets for three days, and the distant booming of cannon shows that the fighting is not yet at an end. Houses have been completely demolished by the artillery, and everywhere windows have been smashed by bullets.

Governor General Doubasoff has prohibited the opening of windows. The better classes are afraid to venture on the streets owing to the fact that numerous bombs and other deadly missiles are being thrown from the windows and roofs of houses. Near the triumphal arch could be seen today, the red flags of the insurgents flying above their barricades. Soldiers surrounded the Continental Hotel and artillery was brought up as it was claimed that a shot had been fired from one of the windows. It was with difficulty that the landlord persuaded the troops not to demolish the building.

As the correspondent entered the telephone exchange he saw two agitators shot by a passing patrol. Artillery can be heard at work near the Nicholas station.

Two attempts on the life of the prefect of police by students, one of them a woman, was frustrated. The students were arrested.

The Bourse Gazette says it is reported that General De Dioulin, prefect of police of St. Petersburg, has been informed by telephone that the number of dead or wounded at Moscow number 10,000 and that when questioned tonight the general did not deny that such a report had been received.

The merchants here complain that they are suffering seriously from the strike in Russia, and are not receiving the information in regard to the situation there, as all letters are carefully censored.

The correspondent of the St. Petersburg Times, wires that it is reported there, that a military terrorist plot has been discovered by the authorities. Fifty arrests have been made in connection with this discovery.

Fruitmen in Convention.

Des Moines, Ia., Special.—The Western Association of Fruit Growers opened its annual meeting here. The attendance is quite large and the meeting presents many interesting features. Many prominent fruit growers and experts from this and other fruit States are in attendance and some highly important papers have been promised to be read.

Wedding Present for Miss Roosevelt.

Washington, Special.—The President's attention has been called to a dispatch from Baker City, Ore., to the effect that a subscription is about to be started for a wedding present for Miss Alice Roosevelt. President Roosevelt stated that while he deeply appreciated the evidence of good will, he hoped nothing of the kind would be undertaken. In fact, he wished particularly that the proposed collection of funds should not be made.

Three Killed, Several Hurt.

Meridian, Miss., Special.—In a rear end collision on the Alabama and Vicksburg railroad at Chunkey, Monday night, two trainmen were killed and three seriously injured and a train load of passengers badly shaken up. The dead are: Vance Lader, a negro fireman, Peter Kenosky, a tramp. Engineer Tucker and his fireman of the freight and Engineer Cocker of the passenger were also injured.