

The Chance of a Lifetime.

THE loud knock of the postman resounded through the thinly-built walls of Waterford Villa, and the thud which followed, as something heavier than a letter fell into the letter box, struck a knell of apprehension in Mary Donovan's heart.

Her first instinct was to rush into the hall, and seize the long official-looking envelope which she knew by painful experience was lying there.

The presence of her mother and sisters, however, acted as a deterrent, for they were not in sympathy with her, and if what she feared was a returned story proved to be only a circular, her undue haste would have immediately caused them to put into words what she would prefer to remain unexpressed.

"Letters," cried Norah. "Patterns I ordered," declared Elsie. And they hurried out of the room.

An amicable wrestle, and then a long-drawn exclamation of disgust, followed by an ominous pause, the import of which Mary knew only too well, and the packet was laid before her.

She left it untouched on the table while, with trembling hands, she continued sewing some buttons on her gloves.

Her eyes were swimming with unshed tears, and the lump in her throat grew bigger and bigger.

The cheerful conversation of her relations, which the advent of the postman had interrupted, was not renewed.

The silence was more painful than any comments could have been, and perhaps Elsie, the youngest of the girls, realized this in her easy, good-natured way, for, after humming a few bars of the latest waltz, she began to talk about the dance to which she and Norah were going in the following week.

But it was flogging a dead horse; the subject had already been exhausted, and the returned MSS. had suggested thoughts of an unpleasant nature which were not to be diverted.

Mrs. Donovan had been left a widow, with three daughters and a modest income.

The eldest and youngest of these girls, Norah and Elsie, were fashioned after her own heart, both as regards mental attainments, up-to-date accomplishments and social tastes.

But Mary was a thorn in the flesh, the fly in the ointment, a very real disappointment.

For, whereas her sisters had imbibed the minimum of instruction from their school lessons, Mary had thirsted to drink deeply from the well of knowledge, and as they all grew older her tastes differed from theirs in every respect, and almost unconsciously she dropped out of their lives, and led a more or less solitary existence.

Certain duties were relegated to each one, for the household only boasted a woman servant and a boy. Mary performed her tasks faithfully, but while her sisters danced and enjoyed the pleasures which the late Major Donovan's friends seemed to find delight in showering on his widow and her attractive daughters, she dreamed away the hours.

Such conduct was incomprehensible to Mrs. Donovan, who, naturally enough, used to calculate what a number of things Mary might have done in the time wasted, and when she had got the sum total clearly represented in her mind, she would lay it in its appalling nakedness before Mary's shrinking gaze.

But the day came, as it comes to all who are afflicted with a temperament like Mary's, when she thought she would "write."

Success lay before her mental vision writ in huge letters; she would pour forth into the ears of a sympathetic public what had hitherto remained unspoken in her own heart.

But "the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts," and oftentimes a weariness to those who have to listen to them, and considerate editors guarded their public from being bored with those expressed by Mary Donovan.

She cast her bread on the editorial waters, only to have it returned after many days.

When she had propounded the idea of her venture in all its rawness to her people their attitude had been non-committal.

Mrs. Donovan acknowledged that it might answer, but her dubious expression conveyed her disbelief in any success, and she told Mary that any expenses, such as typewriting, postage, etc., must be paid for out of her dress money.

To their credit be it said, her family was very long-suffering with her, and at first the duties which she straightway neglected were done by her sisters without complaint; but as the months went by, and the only results of her hours of labor were severe headaches, and the sure and certain return of all the MSS. she sent out, their patience began to diminish, and Mrs. Donovan had almost come to the conclusion that a long enough trial had been given

and that Mary must leave her scribbling and try to give her mind to "the common round and trivial task" of daily life.

The return of this last story turned her indecision into determination, and thinking it a fitting opportunity for expressing it, she was about to do so when her eye lighted upon a letter which she had not noticed before, lying by the side of the poor rejection.

"Haven't you better read your letter, my dear?" she said, in a voice which suggested that sympathy and irritation were having a tussle in the maternal bosom.

As Mary leaned forward to take it two scalding tears fell on the envelope. She would have given all she possessed to have been able to rush to her room and have her cry out, but, instead, she tried to read the words which danced before her misty gaze. But as she read the mist cleared, and her cheeks flushed with excitement.

"Listen!" she exclaimed, and in a voice which shook, in spite of her effort to control it, she read:

"The Talbots, Tuesday Afternoon.

"My Darling Mary:

"How are your stories getting on? I was so sorry to hear you had that one about 'Love's Revenge' back. I thought it splendid, but it's always so; nothing that is really good gets published. I have sent some sweet poems up to several papers, and they always come back. But, cheer up, dear, now is the chance of our lifetime.

"Tom has a friend coming to spend a week with us. They were at Oxford together, and think the world of each other; and, my dear, he is an editor. Think of it, Mary! And mother says I may ask you to come and stay with us at the same time. Could anything be better?

"Bring everything you have ever written, and I will collect all my poems (how fortunate we shap't clash), and it will be a strange thing if, after this, we don't get everything published.

"Good-by, dear, I am so excited.

"Yours ever, KITTIE."

"P. S.—I shall expect you by the 3.40 on Saturday. No more returns, Mary!"

The joyfulness of the tones in which Mary read the last words proved quite contagious. Mrs. Donovan instantly abandoned the idea of nipping her daughter's hope of a literary career in the bud, at all events until this visit had been paid, and then gave her willing consent to Mary to go.

Norah and Elsie, who knew nothing of editors, asserted their firm conviction that Mary would suddenly leap into fame.

An acceptance of the invitation was hastily penned, and the following days were spent in making preparations for the event.

Mary's mother and sister were indefatigable, and by Saturday morning she possessed a dress basket full of pretty clothes, and the parting farewells she received from her family when she had taken her seat in the train which was to bear her to Lett-bury were mingled with earnest exhortations not to forget their instructions respecting what she was to wear, and when she was to wear it.

"I do hope something will come of it all," murmured Mrs. Donovan fervently, and on her way home from the station she took the opportunity of paying several calls wherein, with no intention of inaccuracy, she gave the impression that Mary—"that quiet little puss, you know"—had actually got her foot on the ladder of fame and fortune, and at the present moment was on her way to see an editor about her "novels."

When Mary finally arrived at her destination, her excitement and a new and delightful sense of self-importance prevented her from observing that her friend Kitty, who, with her brother, had come to meet the expected guest, was looking particularly dejected.

"Don't mention literature," was hastily and emphatically whispered in her ear under cover of their girlishly effusive embrace.

She was mystified at the tone, but not until she and Kitty were alone before they dressed for dinner was any explanation vouchsafed.

And then, with tears of mortification, Kitty told her that Tom had found out what she had intended to do, and he had been simply horrid about it.

He had said it would be behaving shamefully to put his friend in such an awkward position, and he had made her promise not to say a word about the poems or stories.

"Silly trash!" he called them," said Kitty. "Oh! brothers are hateful," she added, vindictively; "but I had to promise, or he said he wouldn't take me to the Eights, and I have a particular reason for going this year," she said, blushing consciously.

It was with a feeling akin to despair that Mary went down to dinner—the editor was to take her in. But what did it matter now? What would they say at home?

And she felt she had been lured away under false pretenses.

It was a week later. On the morrow Mary Donovan would return home, and her visit would be a thing of the past.

The world was full of spring sunshine, and Kitty had suggested a walk through the woods to her old nurse's cottage, where they could have tea, and then a walk home in the moonlight.

The idea had met with instant approval, and the little party of Kitty and Mary, Tom and his fiancée, her brother and John Graham, otherwise the editor, had sallied forth.

It seemed to have become the custom for John Graham to escort Mary Donovan, and on this occasion he started with her as a matter of course.

He was nearly forty; she was not eighteen.

Kitty, whose chevalier was still a minor, apologized for this discrepancy of years. "It's too bad," she said. "Looked at in the light of an editor, age doesn't matter; but as a man, he's no fun at all for you." Mary smiled enigmatically, but made no rejoinder.

The al fresco tea in nurse's kitchen round the open fireplace was over. Tom and his fiancée and Kitty and her Oxonian had vanished mysteriously. John Graham and Mary Donovan were left alone.

"Shall we go into the woods?" said the man.

A pang went through Mary's heart.

"He finds me dull," she thought.

They went out into the sweet, lilac-scented air. A thrush trilled joyously near by.

"It isn't only a young man's fancy which lightly turns to thoughts of love in springtime," said John Graham, wistfully.

Mary looked up questioningly, and then, as she saw the yearning look in the face bent toward her, her eyes fell and her breath came quickly.

"Mary, am I too old for you to love?"

Mary did not reply in words, but in some mysterious way negatived the suggestion.

The thrush sang on unconcernedly, but Kitty, who was just appearing round the corner, retired discreetly.

"I am glad you are not one of those girls who go in for writing, Mary," said the "editor" some hours later.

Mary laughed inside. "I go in for being engaged," she said, mischievously.

"My darling!" said the man.

"And after all," said Kitty, "it was the chance of your lifetime."—Penny Pictorial Magazine.

The Fur of the Muskrat.

The fur of the muskrat is dense and soft, resembling somewhat that of the beaver, but it is shorter and inferior in denseness, fineness and durability. It resists the water during the life of the animal, but is readily wetted immediately after death. The color is generally of a drab blue, in some cases with a whitish appearance, and tipped with reddish brown. The fur is concealed by long, stiff, brown overhairs on the upper part and sides of the body. The general color of the animal is dark amber brown, almost blackish brown, on the back and gray below, but specimens are found ranging through the various shades of brown, blue and yellow to pure white. The white muskrats are of no more value in the fur trade than those of ordinary colorings, yet they are highly prized by collectors of natural history specimens. The fur of the smaller muskrat found in Alaska is of a light silvery color, almost white on the abdomen, and is very fine, the pelts from that locality having been highly prized when beaver hats were in fashion.—New York Times.

Fish Without Fear.

In rare instances fish appear to be without fear. This was particularly noticeable in the case of several trunk fishes which I found on the Florida reef in an old dead coral head of large size. At low tide I could reach from my boat nearly to the bottom of the head by bending over, and in attempting to dislodge some gorgonias which were clinging to the coral I was surprised to see several of the little armored fishes swim up to my hand and permit me to touch them—an act which I often repeated. The mullet is very tame. I have frequently stood knee-deep on the outer reef and had large schools all about me within eight or ten feet, and even when I moved along they were not alarmed. This sociability explains the possibility of taking them with the cast net.—Scientific American.

Takes the Palm For Ugliness.

For sheer ferocity of appearance unredeemed by any milder facial attributes, says the Westminster Gazette, a lizard called "Moloch, horrid king," Moloch horridus, is pre-eminent among reptiles. The body is so covered with spines that, as it has been put, nature seems to have endeavored to ascertain how many spines could be inserted on a given area. But, unlike its tutelary deity, who seems really to have spelt himself Molech, the lizard does not demand the blood of children. It is indeed vegetarian, and only fiery in that it has a curious faculty of drying up water. A specimen placed in a shallow dish was observed to attract the water like a piece of blotting paper. Three specimens have recently arrived at the Zoological Gardens from Australia where the creature lives.

SOUTHERN FARM TOPICS

Devoted Exclusively to the Interest of Dixie Farmers.

Planting Fall Crops.

There are very many crops that can be profitably grown in the fall and early winter, writes J. B. Hunnicutt, in the Southern Cultivator. Irish potatoes, rutabagas, turnips, beets, beans, melons, cabbage and tomatoes are among the vegetable crops which may be profitably planted. All of these crops require thorough preparation of the soil. Grass and weeds must be entirely destroyed, the ground be broken deeply, so as to supply moisture readily, the soil should be made very fine, so that the tender roots can strike deeply and capillary attraction circulate the water freely.

Fall markets are generally good and these crops pay well to grow. That there is great demand for them is clearly shown from the fact that we buy largely of these crops from other sections.

Every farmer can find full use for all his time in preparing for and planting these crops.

If for any reason you do not wish to put your time in on any of the above crops, we call your attention to the fact that this is a good time to begin breaking stubble and waste lands for sowing grain this fall or for planting next season. Of course, you will have to exercise good judgment as to the condition of the clay. If there should be plenty of rain do not plow, until the clay is dry. If the clay is in proper condition it is not too soon to begin this work. The earlier this work is done the better results you can look for next year. Do not fear the sunshine. Sunshine does not hurt dry land. It pays to keep the harrows right up with the plows. This will prevent any danger of hard clods being formed should any clay be thrown up with the plow that was rather wet.

Grass Seeding.

Each succeeding year brings us more enquiries as to how to secure a good stand of grass than the past one, a sure indication that Southern farmers are at last beginning to appreciate that grass and hay is a crop in which there is profit to the grower and improvement to the land. This tendency to abandon arable for grass land is one that is going to be intensified by existing economic causes. Arable cultivation, especially in cotton and tobacco crops, demands an abundance of cheap and readily available labor. Whilst trade was languishing, and the South had not entered the field of commercial activity, this labor was here abundant and ready at all times to be commanded at low wages. Now conditions have changed and the cry is that labor is scarce, unreliable and dear. This is affecting farmers seriously, and is going to bring about a change in the system of farming. Arable land is going to be put down to grass and more live stock be kept. This is a change greatly to be desired in the interest of farmers themselves and also of our lands. No grass country is ever long a poor one. The richest agricultural sections in this country and the Old World are those in which grass lands are the most extensive and there the greatest degree of home comfort is to be found. A large farmer said to us a few days ago, "I am bound to make a change in my system of farming. I will reduce the area of my arable lands, farm them more intensively, and thus get a greater yield per acre, and put down into permanent grass a large part of my farm and keep a much larger head of live stock. There is money in stock when rightly bred and fed, and but little profit in the production of arable crops with the present high rate of wages for labor." He was right, and it is going to be profitable for all Southern farmers to follow his example.—The Southern Planter.

Pumpkins, the Stolen Crop.

Pumpkins are said to be a stolen crop, because they are usually raised among corn without any additional labor except planting the seeds, and the seeds may be dropped at the same time when planting the corn, says The Planter. Some farmers think there is nothing gained by raising pumpkins among corn, because they appropriate part of the fertility which should go to the corn, and thereby lessen the value of the corn more than the worth of the pumpkins. This may be true where the land is too poor to supply nourishment enough for the corn; but such land should never be planted with corn, east, west, north or south, for no matter how thorough the tillage may be a paying crop of corn can never be raised on poor land unless it is well manured.

A good, thick sod turned under, or a field well manured with stable manure, will produce a good crop of pumpkins, and just as much corn as if the pumpkins had not been planted.

Fed in moderation, and in addition to oats or meal, there is no doubt

pumpkins are a cheap and hearty addition to the horses' diet, especially where they must be kept up all the time and cannot be allowed to run in pasture.

Horses and cattle fed plentifully on them will drink scarcely any water, the juice of the pumpkins furnishing all the liquid they require. I used to break them up and throw them into the pen for my hogs, just as I saw my neighbors do, and for a long time had a poor opinion of them for hog feed. The hogs would eat the seed, gnawed a little out of the inside and wasted the remainder. I soon learned there was a better way of feeding. When cut in small pieces, and sprinkled with meal, hogs will eat a good many pumpkins and eat them up clean. It pays well for cutting up. Six small hogs will eat a bushel of cut pumpkins twice a day, and eat them with an apparent relish. With what pumpkins they will eat they can be fattened on one-half the usual quantity of grain.

Keep Pure-Bred Hogs.

Notwithstanding the fact that the United States Department of Agriculture has gone to the expense and trouble of issuing a forty-page bulletin, telling Southern farmers how to make a big profit out of hogs, and warning them against keeping and raising scrubs, and despite the fact that to the most casual observer the loss sustained in feeding such stock is obvious, we still find in the South a vast number of men who continue to throw their money away in a futile attempt to make a profit out of them.

The scrub hog is undoubtedly one of the greatest drawbacks that Southern agriculture has.

The hog in the West has earned for himself the title of "mortgage lifter," but how many scrubs do you find among these "mortgage lifters?"

There is no doubt that with well-bred swine bacon can be made as cheaply in the South as anywhere in the United States, and yet go to any grocery store south of Mason and Dixon's line and you will find there "Western meat" for sale.

This is a sad commentary on the astuteness and progressive spirit of the Southern farmer.

If every scrub hog in the South were replaced with improved swine, "Western meat" would soon vanish from our markets and Southern swine raisers soon begin to climb up instead of "climbing" down.

Poland China, Chester White, Essex, Duroc Jersey, Tamworth and Berkshire are our best known breeds of improved swine, and no doubt they are all good, but, from personal experience and observation, I believe the Poland China is by far the most popular and profitable hog we have.—Southern Planter.

Advice to "All Cotton Farmers."

It used to be possible to make money on farms where no other crop than cotton was planted, but that was in the days when the staple commanded prices that are now impossible. Under conditions as they exist to-day an occasional cotton crop may be made and marketed with profit, but the loss resulting from the very next season's operations will in all probability throw the balance on the other side of the ledger. The "all-cotton" farmers are getting poorer every year, but still they are in evidence in this as in every other section of the cotton-producing States. There are hundreds of farmers of the other class mentioned who are "getting there with both feet" in the race for prosperity and financial independence. They are not neglecting cotton altogether, but make it of secondary importance, among products of the farm. Their first concern is for food crops for man and beast, out of which is set aside a sufficient quantity for the maintenance of the farm from year's end to year's end. The money that comes in is clear profit, and doesn't have to be posted against family groceries and interest accounts.—Albany Herald.

Cutting Sorghum Stalks.

Cow-peas and sorghum should be cut before the sorghum stalks become hard, and will be found easier to cure than peas alone, as the sorghum keeps the vines from becoming so compact as to keep out the wind and sun. Millet should not be allowed to stand until the seed forms, but be cut when in bloom. When partially cured, put up in cocks and cure out, and thus keep the color and sweet smell of the hay.

Good Fall Crops.

English peas and snap beans may be sown for a fall crop. These are uncertain as to yield, but if the fall be mild, and there be sufficient rain to cause them to make a quick growth, they often make a nice crop which is of ready sale and always acceptable on the home table.

Egg Plant Succeeds Everywhere.

Egg plant succeeds to the very best advantage all throughout the South, and makes a most delicious vegetable.

Thirty-eight per cent. of the habitual drunkards in London are women. The coral roads of Bermuda are the finest in the world for cycling. They are as smooth as a dancing floor, and are never dirty.