

Miscellaneous.

THE FIRST QUARREL.

'Sakes alive! what a looking room! I declare. George Graham, if you aren't enough to try the patience of Job! I don't believe there is another woman living has to bear what I do! Who'd ever think that I came in here after breakfast and worked a good hour putting things to rights! And now, what does it look like?

Tears stood in the little wife's eyes, and her face lengthened out till you would have thought she had just heard of a death.

What is it, Susie, What's up now? What does *what* look like? And Mr. Graham turned carelessly and good naturedly too, from the double-leaded article on Reconstruction, which he had been so earnestly reading that though he had heard, he had scarcely comprehended a word of the complaint.

That's just like you, George! If I were to tell you the house was on fire, you'd only look round and say, where, Susie?

He laughed, a hearty laugh it was too, clear and ringing; a laugh that many a wife would have treasured up as men do pearls and precious stones.

It nettled Mrs. Graham and she said, sharply, If you'd open your eyes, you'd see what does *what* look like.

He rubbed them briskly, and then peered around. I declare, Susie, I don't know what you mean. The carpet is swept, the furniture dusted, the lamps trimmed, the fire bright—what is it? I can't for the life of me see anything wrong!

You can't! No, of course you can't! See there, and there, and there, and there, and she pointed rapidly, her emphasis growing more incisive each time, to his heavy overcoat which lay in a tumbled mass on the lounge; to his hat which was lodged unceremoniously in the middle of her work basket; to his rubbers which were roasting on the stove hearth, and to his gloves which had demurely settled themselves on the mantel-piece.

I see, I see, Susie, but then you know I'm a careless, good-for-nothing sort of a fellow who never had any bringing up, and you must make allowances, my dear, and tossing the paper on the table he caught her hand and drew her gently upon his lap and said soothingly as one might talk to a fretful child, don't be cross now, pet, 'cause I didn't mean anything bad, you know. Put up your lips and let me kiss away that pout.

But the lips were not put up to meet the touch of those bearded ones. Instead they assumed rigidity, squareness, immobility.

Must I have the lecture first, wifey, before I can either give or claim a kiss? Well, out with it then. The sooner I'm whipped the sooner it'll stop hurting, as I used to say to the boys when the schoolmaster was after me with the rod of correction. But, Susie, and here his tones, which had so far been jocular, assumed a touching earnestness, I don't like this being scolded every time I come into the house. I've borne it so far patiently, but it is wearing out my temper. I shan't be able to hold out much longer, I'm afraid. I shall scold back and then we'll quarrel, and then—our home will be no home, but—shall I say it, Susie? what too many homes are, nothing more or less than cheap editions of hell itself.

But, George, how can I help it? You do try me terribly.

How, Susie?

Why, by never putting your things where they belong. I was brought up to have a place for everything and everything in its place, and it does worry me to come in from the kitchen, tired and hot, and then find the sitting room looking so. I like to have things neat and orderly.

But you know we can't have all we want in this world, Susie, and is it worth while for you to fret your life away just because I can't always think to put my gloves in my pocket, and hang up my coat and hat, and leave my rubbers in the entry.

That word fret was an unfortunate one; it stung her, and she said, bitterly: But you never think, George. You come rushing in like a whirlwind, and you toss your things pell-mell every which way, and if they are ever picked up and put in their places, it's not you, that do it, and I'm getting

tired of it. I can't and I won't stand it any longer.

What will you do, Susie? There was severity in his tone now.

Do? Why, I won't stand it. I won't be any man's slave; and the black eye flashed defiantly.

Did I ever ask you to be my slave? The man's eyes were flashing now.

But what else am I? I toil like one from morning till night to do up the work and put things in order, and you come in and undo it all, just as I've got through. It is enough to make a saint swear.

She was so excited now she hardly knew what she said.

And what am I, he retorted. If you're a slave, I am one quite as much. Who earns every cent that's brought in? Who pays the rent, and buys the fuel, and lays in the provisions? Who clothes Mrs. Susan Graham, I'd like to know.

She earned her own clothes once, and she can do it again, George Graham, if it is necessary, and no thanks to you, or any other man.

It's a pity she hadn't kept on earning them herself. Then she'd never had to pick up and put away her husband's and he—well it wouldn't be gentlemanly to say it—

Out with it, sir. Never spoil a joke for relation's sake.

And he wouldn't have caught a Tartar, but been a happy old bach. Lord, but how I wish I was!

Are you in earnest, sir?

In earnest, madam.

Then perhaps we'd better part: Part it is, then.

The sooner the better, too.

My sentiments exactly, madam To-day.

Why not!

Where will you go?

I? I shan't go. I shall stay here.

But you don't mean to say you're going to turn me out of house and home! I never would believe that of you, George Graham.

It isn't I that's turning you out. You're turning yourself out. Suppose you stay; you've no money to pay the rent, or run the affair. It costs something to keep the house, I tell you. I've found it out by bitter experience.

But where can I go? You know I haven't a relative left me.

You should have thought of that before you proposed parting. 'Tis not my business to look you up a home.

I don't know whose else it is. You might do as much as that for your own wife.

For my wife I'd do a great deal more. But you are not my wife any more; only the legal tie remains to be severed, and I'll apply for a divorce at once.

And disgrace us both?

But what can a fellow do? Now I've got used to having a home I want one, and once free from you, there are dozens of girls that'll be glad to take up with me, careless, good for nothing scapegrace as I am.

And a pretty life they would lead you, too.

It can't be worse than what you've led me the last six months. Zounds! but I've been a fool to bear it so long. Fret, fret, from morning till night. Thank Heaven, it is all over at last! and he whistled gaily.

You seem glad to get rid of me, sir.

You've made me glad, madam. He put on his overcoat, drew on his rubbers, and gathered up his hat and gloves. Was he really going and without his dinner?

When will you be ready to leave? madam? I'll order a carriage at any hour you name.

You are an unfeeling wretch, George Graham; you are, and that's the truth. You might, for decency's sake, give till to-morrow to pick up my things and decide what to do.

You can have a week, madam, if you wish, I thought you were in a hurry to go. Yes, you may have a week. Meanwhile, I'll go to a hotel.

And have the whole town talking about us! Why can't you stay at home just as well.

Because I never like to be in anybody's way.

But it is your own house and—and—if you ever had any regard for me, you'll still—till I'm gone. Her voice was not quite as steady as it had been.

Well, I'll stay then. I'll come back to-night. You needn't sit up for me, Mrs. Graham. It'll be late when I get in, and—I'll take the spare chamber till you're gone.

The front door clashed after him in

another moment. He was gone; gone without his dinner; gone, and not coming back till—nobody knew when, and then going up stairs to sleep alone. They had quarrelled. They had as good as parted. They would be divorced. He could get another wife and bring her home here and she—she would have to go alone into the cold, dreary world and earn her own living. She didn't know enough about divorces, poor thing, to think of alimony. And all this because he neglected to leave his things in the hall, and she found fault with him for the said neglect! Careless husband! Fidgety wife! And because he was careless and she fidgety, they must live apart.

Mrs. Graham looked about her just then. Everything was neat and orderly. There was nothing to worry her! Nothing? There was everything. And she sat down and cried; she who had been so resolute and defiant only ten minutes before. But that resolution, that defiance had been born of anger, and the anger was all gone now. How sorry she was she'd been so cross to him, for she had been cross, real cross, wickedly cross. What if he had tossed his things any and every way! It was a man's trick, and—here she sobbed outright, he never had a mother to train him. Poor fellow, he'd been knocked around from pillar to post all his life till he married, and now he would have to knock around again, for of course he couldn't get married right away; no, he would have to get a house-keeper, and then she'd worry the life out of him, and when he did get married could he find one who'd love him as she had and did, yes, did!—the love was there yet, swelling up and overflowing.

She went into the kitchen, hardly knowing why; driven, perhaps by the force of habit. There stood the table, for dinner, and so neatly; the cloth white and in its creases; the plates and the glasses shining brightly; the knives and forks polished to almost silver whiteness. She gave it one look and mechanically opened the stove oven. The chicken was browning nicely; George liked roast chicken better than a fricassee, so she had cooked it in that way. The potatoes and the turnips were dancing merry jigs in the pot, and the tea kettle was softly humming.—The mince pie stood on the hearth warming itself quietly and exhaling a spicy odor that was tempting even to a dyspeptic stomach.

Such a nice dinner and no one to eat it! I wish—I wish—I—I hadn't been so cross to him. I began it, and kept it up, too; he wasn't cross first; he held out till I made him mad. I wish he was more careful, thoughtful—such a dear good fellow as he is about everything else. Never scolds when bills come in like Hannah Benton's husband. Mercy! I don't know how she does live with him. And he's always giving me change, too. I never hardly ever have to ask for a cent; I don't know what I should do if I had to manage as Carrie Stanford does to get a dollar out of Jim. If I had such a man I'd leave him if I had to work my fingers to the bone to earn my living. And he wants me to have a girl and be dressed up all the time, and read, and practice, and go out with him, and there's poor little Mary Miller that never sits down once a week, but is forever stewing in the kitchen, and never a word of thanks, Joe always wondering why she don't do more than she does. He ought to go to a treadmill himself. And he never tastes a drop of liquor, nor wouldn't for the world. And there's Nelly Grey's sort of a husband coming home beastly drunk every night of his life and scaring the life out of her.—I'd see him drowned before I'd live with him. And he never smokes, nor chews while you can't go into anybody's else hardly without standing over spittoons, or being suffocated with somebody's pipe or cigar. Dear me! I should die in a week if I had to live that way. And he is always so good natured, too, never gave me a cross word till to-day, but here she broke down entirely, sob after sob tearing away in her throat and threatening to choke her.

The paroxysm was too violent to last long. As it subsided, she dashed off the tears that flooded her cheeks, wiped her eyes, brushed back her hair, and, going to the sink, bathed her face thoroughly.—Then she stood a few minutes as if gathering up resolution, a calm, beautiful expression playing about her lips.

The words of her old pastor had come back to her all at once as she sat there

weeping. The words he had spoken to her the evening before her marriage.—My little girl, you have made a good choice. George Graham, your promised husband, is a young man of excellent principles and a good disposition, and will do his best to make you happy. But he is not perfect. No man is. And you must be patient with his failings—always patient. One cross word leads to another, till by and by there's a quarrel, and then good by to happiness! Don't scold, but coax; don't drive, but lead. And if you ever feel tired with him, think how much worse it might have been. And always, always remember that he is no saint, but only a man; a man, mortal and weak?—Be it your work, little girl, to make this earthly home a happy one, and lead him onward and upward toward that holier one not made with hands.

Dead; yet speaketh, she said solemnly, as that long earnest talk came back to her. And—and, I'll do it any way. If he won't forgive, if he won't agree to begin again and try it over, why—Oh, I never can go out alone into the world, and see him marry another woman. Oh, I'll never say another word, I won't not one, if he has every chair piled to the ceiling with coats and pants, and the floor waist deep with boots and rubbers. I don't see what made me speak so cross to him. I'll get a girl tomorrow; somebody that can cook better than I, and I'll keep out of the kitchen; and whenever he comes in I'll take his things myself and take care of them. What must he have thought of me to hear me say such dreadful things!

And filling up the stove with coal, draining the water off the vegetables, and leaving the oven door open, she ran up stairs and put on her sacque and bonnet, seized her mug and gloves, and locking the door after her, went out.

It was bitter cold, but she did not mind it. The wind was driving the sleet right into her face, but she only drew the thick veil closer over her swollen eyes and hurried on. It was slippery as glass; but gaitered feet ran along as if sharp shod.—She had but one thought; to see George again, tell him how sorry she was, and bring him back to dinner.

With a shout and a hurrah! a little fellow came coasting down one of the cross streets, just as she had set her foot on the curb-stone. The sled whirled, zigzagged a moment and then ran her down. She screamed involuntarily, and as she fell, put out her hands imploringly. Some one clasped them, held them tightly a brief spell, and then gently assisted her to her feet. Some one spoke to her. Some one said kindly, tenderly, lovingly, Are you much hurt, Susie? Some one drew aside her veil. Some one looked pityingly into her eyes. Who was it, thank you?

O, George! I'm so glad you happened here. I was going down to the office after you.

He looked about him a few seconds, and then said, meaningly, Just *half way and we met*.

The next minute he was tucking her little hand under his elbow and guiding her back home, walking slowly, cautiously, and asking at every few steps if she was not much hurt, and adding he'd send the little rascal to jail, if she were, to all of which she said earnestly, Not any hardly; only frightened a little: I'm so glad we met.

Inside the front door, before hardly the lock had sprung, he caught her to his heart, and as he held her in the warm, close embrace, he kissed her passionately.

What did you think of me my darling, for talking so to you? you don't know how sorry I am.

What did you think of me, George, scolding you as I did; if you only knew how I cried afterwards.

But I plagued you dreadfully, I know, Susie. You're so neat, and I'm such a careless scamp.

It was I who plagued you, George.—I've no business to be so neat as to make myself a fussy, cross old thing, and I won't any more. I won't say a word, George, if you turn the whole house topsy-turvy every time you come in. Oh, George to think of our quarreling so, before we've been married a year!

And you running away to leave me here alone. O, Susie, I should have run after you before morning.

It was awful the way we talked to each other. Can you ever forgive me?

Yes indeed; I forgave you ten minutes after I reached the office; though going down there, Susie, I did wish al-