

THE EVENING NEWS.

Thursday, - February, 22, 1871.

(Price, "English Society,"
TWICE AS EXPENSIVE.)

"It is just what he would do, sir," she continues; "and I did think you were such a quiet young gentleman, Mr. Herbert. Law! Crummins," she adds, turning to him, "you wouldn't spoil a bit of fun like that, I know."

"But Mr. Domville," begins her husband.

"Nonsense Mr. Domville!" she replies. "He needn't know, and if he does, why, he'd laugh as much as any one."

"But you will be careful, sir, won't you?" says Crummins, yielding to the two of us. "You won't let Mr. Domville know. There isn't any one likely to be there as will recognize me, I hope."

I satisfy him on these points; then Mrs. Crummins with due courtesy for her position among our neighbors, takes us nearer home. "It won't do, though, sir," she says, "for you and Crummins to go out together. The people about here all know he is going out walking; and may be, if they saw you together, they might think you were a waif too."

I don't see that it would matter if they did, but to my husband such a mistake would be very serious.

We stop to have a smoke, and over again his directions how to wait. We stop the cab at the corner of the street leading to the square, and walk on to the house.

There's a clock. Crummins and I are in the cab on our way to Bedford square. The whole time he is either laughing at my going out with him or nervous as to what to say. In the latter mood he is almost pitiful in his entreaties to me to be careful, and repeat over and over again his directions how to wait. We stop the cab at the corner of the street leading to the square, and walk on to the house.

It is a big house with a large hall. There is a window by the street-door at one end, and a broad staircase at the other. The dining-room is far-reared, with walls of painted and hung round with pictures. It is rather heavy-looking, however, and the furniture is old and massive. There are three servants going about with trays and piles of plates, busily laying out the table. They stare at me as I stand by the side of Crummins, and he introduces me as a young friend who wants to see a little genteel walking, and whom he has made enough to bring. "Then is it that setting up such a fine establishment of business, and asks several questions as to the number and names of the guests? I notice that the servants all treat him with great respect, and he, in return, is condescending and polite to them. With me, when they are in the room, he assumes an authoritative air, and at the same time is very grave, and looks as if the weight of his position were too much for him. He handles once, when alone, as I have him, a jolly, and then his muscles begin relaxed, and a fit of laughing suddenly breaks out again. He cannot laugh aloud, but he laughs inaudibly, and shakes so tremendously, that the jelly rolls and trembles to an alarming degree, and it is only by the means of promptly taking it under my own protection that I save it from being shaken to the floor.

"Oh! Let's to think of you being here," he mutters; and the next instant is gravity itself, as Mrs. Domville's voice is heard on the stairs.

She is a middle-aged lady, and speaks in a friendly manner to Crummins, and in particular her inquiries after his wife and children. He points me out as a young friend, who when he comes to call him and Mrs. Domville, will quite satisfied, and goes up stairs again to the drawing-room.

Four o'clock. The dinner is ready, and all the guests have arrived. Crummins stations me behind the door, and goes himself to the head of the table, and I watch the people as they come into the room and take their places.

And all the guests are quite satisfied, like their host and hostess, and evidently old friends for several nod to Crummins, one gentleman is quite hearty in his greeting, and says if would not seem like Christmas dinner without him.

Mr. Domville laughs, and asks after Mrs. Crummins; but Crummins refuses to be thawed, and replies in a tone as if such trifling questions interfered with the responsibility of his position.

So far everything has gone right. Then comes the dinner. First course is served and eaten, and Mr. Domville is going to say grace, Crummins gives me a signal, and I step forward quietly to close the door. The movement attracts the attention of a young lady, who is sitting with her back to me, and she turns round. She evidently has not noticed me before, and her laughing gray eyes seem to be looking directly at me. She is one of the many well-known faces round the table. I suppose she thinks I am a guest, who has arrived late and just come into the room, and, seeing me standing there and no one taking any notice of me, she says courteously,

"Is there a chair for you?" Then turning round to Mrs. Domville, "Oh, aunt here is a gentleman left outside in the cold."

Mr. Domville, instead of saying grace, looks at me, and half turns from his chair, while the company all turn to me. It is certainly an embarrassing moment; but Mrs. Domville comes to the rescue, and says quietly, "It is quite right, Helen." The young lady looks a little confused, and then Crummins, in his nervousness, spoils everything by rushing up to her and calling out,

"He's come to help me wait, Miss Linton."

My fair champion thereupon blushes very deeply, and begs my pardon; several of the guests have simultaneous twitches of the mouth; Crummins looks half angry, half apologetically, at me; and last Mr. Domville in a shaky voice, says grace, while Miss Linton bows her head very low, and hides her face. The young lady, however, is more and more perturbable than ever, removes the cover of the soup, and the dinner begins.

I believe I aught myself very creditably. Crummins declares that I did wonderfully well, and is inclined to think, I believe, that I have wasted natural talent by not being a waiter. At any rate, I don't spill anything over anybody's dress, or smudge anybody on the head. I carefully wash Crummins for him, and manage to have him seated at a dinner-table, though not in the capacity of a waiter, I have some idea of what ought to be done, and so remove the right covers, and hand round such dishes as ought to be handed at the proper time. The great difficulty I have is to keep my composure, especially when I am trying to serve Miss Linton. She is so bright looking, and it is so fun to see the sparkle in her eyes, and the way they drop if they meet mine, and a little repressed smile steal over her lips, that it takes my powers to the utmost to keep from laughing. I feel that I should very much like to change my place with you, and sit at your side. He is a good boy, and deserves much to say for himself, and especially every dish, as it is handed to him, through an eye-glass. His inspection is so long, and his nose is so close, that I have a growing inclination each time to bob the dish up in his face. For more than half the dinner, he is a good boy, and deserves a little patting—oh, Crummins, you and Miss Linton immediately encapsulate the strongest moral principle, upholds woman's suffrage, and their having seats in parliament. This seems to overwhelm him, and he retires from the company with a sigh.

He sits on his chair, when the mince-pies are being served, and says with a faint smile, which dimples his eye-glass and brings it down into his lap. He re-adjusts it slowly, and, not trusting himself to repeat the joke, says he has no more mince-pies.

To be continued.

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