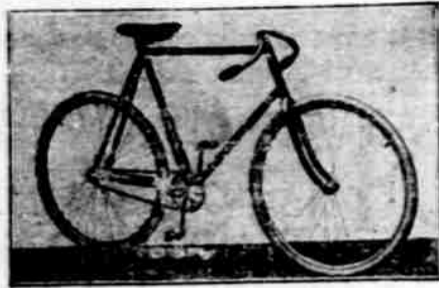


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[Concluded From Last Week.]

"I should think with two of them your responsibility would be a grave one," ventured one robust old gentleman whose knowledge of music was limited, and who confined his remarks to safe generalities.

"That's just it, there are two of them! You would think that one would be care and responsibility enough. But there are two, think of it! Madame Marchesi used to say, 'A little Patti and Campanini,' and I would reply, 'and only one poor commonplace mortal mother to look after them. As I say, when I hear them sing I don't feel as if they belong to me at all. I can't comprehend why I should be selected from among all other women for such a unique position.'"

Mackenzie cast a look of amazed inquiry at his wife. She laughed and whispered, "O, Kate's always like this when she's excited, and she's generally excited."

The little girl had slipped quietly in and now the guests were shaking hands with the children and making them compliments. They received them with quiet indifference, only smiling when courtesy seemed to require it.

"Now Adrienne, get the handkerchief case the Princess of Wales made for you herself and show it to the ladies."

"I think they are all there on the mantle, mamma," replied the child quietly.

"So they are. And here, Mr. Mackenzie, is Jean de Reszke's photograph that he gave Adrienne with the inscription, 'To the Juliette of the future from an old Romeo.' Prettily worded, isn't it? And here is the jeweled miniature of Malibran that the Duke of Orleans gave her, and the opera glasses from Madame Marchesi. And there is the portrait of her husband that Frau Cosima Wagner gave Hermann. Of course he doesn't sing Wagnerian music yet, but ca ira, ca ira, as Madame used to say."

After examining trinkets enough to stock a small museum, Mackenzie said quietly:

"Aren't you just a little afraid of all this notoriety for them at their age? It seems as if there will be nothing left for them later."

He saw at once that he had touched a delicate subject and she threw herself on the defensive. "No, Mr. Mackenzie, I am afraid of nothing that will spur them to their work or make them feel the importance and weight of their art. Remember the age at which Patti began."

Mackenzie glanced at the two frail figures and ventured further. "That's just it, the weight of it. The shoulders are young to bear it all, I'm thinking. Aren't you sometimes afraid it will exhaust them physically?"

"O, they are never ill, and," with her superior smile, "in their art one cannot begin to soon. It is the work of a lifetime, you know, a lifelong consecration. I do not feel that I have any right to curb them or to stop the flight of Pegasus. You see they are beyond me; I can only follow and help them as I may."

Mackenzie turned wearily away. He was thinking of the mother in a certain novel of Daudet's who refused to risk her son's life for a throne. Mrs. Massey shot across the room to show the rotund gentleman those trophies which were perhaps given so lightly, but were in her eyes precious beyond price.

Mackenzie saw the children slip through the portiere into the library and determined to follow them and discover whether these strange little beings were fay or human. They were standing by the big window watching a group

of children who were playing in the outside.

"Say, Ad," said the boy, "do you suppose mamma would let us go out there and snow-ball for awhile? Suppose you ask her."

"It would be no use to ask, Hermann. We should both be in wretched voice this evening. Besides, you know mamma considers those Hamilton children very common.* They do have awfully good times though. Perhaps that's why they are so common. Most people seem to be who have a good time."

"I suppose so. We never get to do anything nice. John Hamilton has a new pair of skates and goes down on the ice in the park every day. I think I might learn to skate anyhow."

"But you'd never get time to skate if you did learn. We haven't time to keep up our Italian, even. I'm forgetting mine."

"O bother our Italian! Ad, I'm just sick of it all. Sometimes I think I'll run away. But I'd practice forever if she'd let us go to-morrow night. Do you suppose she would?"

"I'm awfully afraid not. You know at the beginning of the season she said we must see that opera. I'll tell you: I'll go to the opera if she'll let you go to see them."

"No you won't either! You want to see them just as much as I do. I think we might go! We never get to do anything we want to." He struck the window casing impatiently with his clenched hand.

"What's the matter, children?" said Mackenzie, feeling that he was over-hearing too much.

"O we're talking secrets, sir. We didn't know there was any one in here."

"Well, I'm not any one much, but just an old fellow who likes little folks. Come over hear on the divan and talk to me."

They followed him passively, like children who were accustomed to doing what they were told. He sat down and took the little girl on his knee and put his arm around the boy. He felt so sorry for them, these poor little prodigies who seemed so tired out with life.

"Now I want you to come over and visit my little folks some day and see Billy's goats."

"Are your children musical?" asked the girl.

Mackenzie felt rather abashed. "No, they're not. But they are very nice children, at least I think so."

"Then what could we talk about?"

"O, about lots of things! What do young folks usually talk about? They have a great many books. Do you like to read?"

"Yes, pretty well, but we don't often have time. What do your children read?"

"Well, they like rather old-fashioned books; Robinson Crusoe and The Swiss Family Robinson and Pilgrim's Progress. Do you like Pilgrim's Progress?"

"We never read it, did we Hermann?"

The boy shook his head.

"Never read it? then you must be before you are a year older. It's a great book; full of fights and adventures, you know."

"We have read the legends of the Holy Grail and Frau Cosima Wagner gave us a book of the legends of the Nibelung Trilogy. We liked that. It was full of fights and things. I suppose I will have to sing all that music some day; there is a great deal of it, you know," said the boy apprehensively.

"You work very hard, don't you?"

"O yes, very hard. You see there is so much to do," he replied feverishly.

"Plenty of time, my lad, plenty of