

A GOOD AND PLUCKY WOMAN.

OF the thousands who gather nightly to witness "A Gaiety Girl" in the larger American cities, few play goers have any suspicion of the romance in real life which one of the leading ladies in the company has furnished with a heroine. As she is a modest, self-respecting woman, whose private career is her own business and not the public's, I forbear to give her name, but the story is too interesting in itself to be passed by.

In one of the music halls of London, a number of years ago, was a girl who sang and danced and made merry for the delectation of the gilded youth, with no expectation of ever being lifted out of the sphere in which she was for the time earning an honest living. But something in her bearing attracted the fancy of a young English army officer, a man of good family and reasonable "expectations," who, though moving amid a pretty fast set, was weak rather than bad, and retained amid all his demoralizing surroundings a live spark of admiration for something morally above his level. The other girls at the hall were ready for any kind of a Bohemian frolic with him and his companions; but this one, without any affectation of superior virtue or good sense, stood aloof from the rest, and demanded to be treated with the respect which he would show to any lady in a London drawing-room. Perhaps this piqued his gallantry a little, and made him all the more desirous of winning favor in her eyes, at any rate, after a rather picturesque and unusual courtship extending through several months, he shocked his family and astounded his male friends by announcing that he had asked the hand of the pretty soubrette in marriage, and that she had consented.

His father tried to break off the match by inventing an errand for him which would send him for a long time out of the country; but the son protested that if he went abroad he must carry his wife with him. Then the father tried to pull some wires at the War Office which would result in the son's being ordered to a distant military post; but this plan in turn failed. The mother pleaded with her son on social grounds, pointing out the humiliation which would overcome herself and her daughters when they were cut by their elegant friends who could not draw fine distinctions in public; but he refused to be moved by what he denounced as purely artificial considerations. At last, every argument having been thrown away, the whole family resolved to do the sensible thing and make the best of what they regarded as a very bad matter. They waited till it was convenient for all of them to run over to the continent for a little while; they took the young man's fascinator along, and under their country's flag at a consulate, where there were no busybodies to make trouble or ask needless questions, the young couple were made one. Of course, the next step for the bridegroom was to resign from the army, and his father found for him a position as agent for an English firm in Honolulu. The newly wedded pair took the next steamer for their island home.

Years passed, a son was born—a bright little fellow, with his father's good looks, his mother's vivacity, and an air of distinction which marked him as of superior blood. Society in Honolulu had long ago got over the habit of probing too far into the antecedents of its new members, so long as they came properly introduced, and this was a preliminary to which the husband's family had carefully attended. The ex-soubrette found herself associating with the best the city afforded, and her native cleverness quickly supplied whatever she may have lacked in the conventional education of the salon. An American who has visited her in her house in Honolulu tells me that she shone by contrast with many women who had enjoyed the advantages of social training from their babyhood up. What a good use she made of the studies from the higher walks of real life thus open to her will appear later.

Then came an evil hour when a British ship brought to the harbor, among her other officers, one of the husband's boon companions of the old half-forgotten days. The friend still remained a gentlemanly gambler. He still wasted his nights over the green cloth and his days making up his lost sleep. The husband joined him, at first for a little recreation, afterward because the old spell had fastened itself upon him again and he could not shake it off. The naval officer also had what he would have called "a keen eye for a pettycoat, be gad, sir!" and he began to force unwelcome attentions upon his wife. She resented them and appealed to her husband, who only upbraided her for her prudishness, and for seeing anything to blame in a bit

of fun by his friend. She pleaded with him to be his old self once more, to cease neglecting his business, to remember the respect due to her and the support to be given their child. But in a maudlin, half-indignant way he bade her mind her own affairs and went about his as usual.

The last straw was her discovery that the false friend from home was avenging himself for the slight he had suffered at her hands by going about town and relating the story of her former occupation and her romantic marriage. In spite of the fact that there was nothing in the tale which was not wholly creditable to her, the fact that she had once entertained the public with her voice and—yet more dreadful!—her feet, was damning evidence of her depravity in the eyes of many of her self-righteous neighbors, and meant her ostracism thereafter.

Instead of being roused by this treatment of her to a chivalrous campaign of defense, her husband became cowed and shamefaced. He neglected her and the boy, and let his business go so that his principals presently sent him word to close his books and turn over everything of theirs to his successor, who was already on his way out to Hawaii when the letter of dismissal arrived. Even this blow did not bring him back to her, as she hoped it would; for she was still ready to renew their youthful vows and begin life afresh at the very bottom of the ladder if he would give her any sign that his love survived.

One evening an English vessel was about weighing anchor in the harbor when it was boarded by two passengers, a woman and a little boy. They were bound for the old country. The captain looked the lady over and noticed that she wore no widow's weeds so he politely inquired whether there would come another small boat bearing her husband. She answered in the negative, so the good man assumed that she was a wife going home to her lord, who had preceded her to get their home ready. Several times during the voyage he endeavored to draw from her some clue to her identity or relations, but to no purpose. He prided himself on his knowledge of human nature, and frequently assured his mate that they had a person of some "quality," who for reasons of her own did not care to emphasize the fact. He was right; but the quality was not what he meant—only the sturdy quality of independence. Arrived in England the neglected wife went at once to the home of her husband and saw his father. Into the old man's ears she poured the whole miserable story.

"Now," said she in conclusion, "I am going back to the stage. I can always earn a fair living there, and my experience off it has taught me much which will be of value in the higher professional walk. I know very well how you look at this, but I have fully made up my mind. You shall not suffer the disgrace, as you would consider it, of recognizing your daughter in an actress. I shall adopt a new name which I shall wear everywhere, behind and before the footlights alike. I shall not carry about with me a single token which can identify me as the same woman whom your son married against your will. But you may rest assured I shall do nothing to lower myself even in the unfettered life which I shall lead henceforth. I was a good woman when I met your son; I have never had the disposition to be anything else. The one thing I am anxious about is my boy. He is a noble little fellow and I love him; but I realize that in the roving life which I shall lead I cannot have him with me except at rare intervals. Bitter as it will be to part with him, I am now ready to make the sacrifice if it is to be for his future good. I can earn enough to keep us both in comfort and to give him a fair education. I know you can do better than that if you will. For the sake of the memory of my short-lived happiness, I am ready to make the boy over to you to bring up as your own. Do not alarm yourself! I shall not haunt your neighborhood like a ghost. I fully understand that you go one way henceforth and I go another, and that the parting with my boy, if it must now take place for his good, must be final."

Deeply moved, the old man took his grandson from her. Back she went to her profession, but, as she prophesied, to its higher walks. She had been graduated from the soubrette rank to the delineator of the fine lady. This is what she is doing today, as a rule. And in "A Gaiety Girl"—? No, I have told you once that you shall get nothing more from me; so let that suffice.

What has become of her recreant husband? I don't know. I don't care. If she does, she gives no sign; for to pursue her inquiries very closely would be to reveal her identity, and that is what she pledged herself not to do.

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