

THE DOWNFALL OF THE PENDLETON PRIDE.

BY GRACE LINCOLN HALL.

AS Tom Pendleton walked blithely down the street, a happy whistle half formed on his lips. He was at peace with the world, of which he himself formed no unimportant part. While not foolishly elated, he was well satisfied with himself and with the environments in which a creditably all-wise and beneficent Providence had seen fit to place him.

He was a lawyer, and one to whom prosperity had accorded the right of exclusive-



ness in matters professional as well as social. Clients below a certain prohibitory rating invariably decided, after an interview, that his manifest indifference would hardly be conducive to court favor for them.

He looked back with pride upon a long line of illustrious and aristocratic ancestry. No stains marred the polish on the family name, and if his mother's nose was elevated to a more etherealized scent, there was every reason why it should be.

Pendleton had married one of the choicest belles of the inner circles of the inmost. Beautiful, graceful, tactful, she was eminently fitted to hold queenly sway over his well appointed home.

In short, it might be said of the Pendletons, with truth, that they were always decidedly "good form."

Thus it was that Tom Pendleton was in so happy a frame of mind.

"I mustn't forget to mail Edith's letter when I get down town," he said to himself. "She said it must surely go out this morning."

And that, of course, was the last he thought of it. That night when he was leaving the club, it dropped out of his pocket.

"By jacks!" he exclaimed, "There's Edith's letter. That was a narrow escape, for she starts for Philadelphia in the morning."

As he turned it over, he saw that the envelope was blank. "The little goose," he laughed; "she forgot to address it. Wouldn't it have been a joke on her if I had chucked it into the mail box without looking at it?"

The next morning Mrs. Pendleton left for Philadelphia to visit her friend, Mrs. Philip Sydney Hargrove.

Pendleton returned to his empty house at an early hour that night and experienced a dutiful sense of loneliness as he sat down in the library to read.

He was startled out of a pleasant reverie by the sudden and violent ringing at the door bell—then a woman's voice in the hall and in the next moment his wife burst into the room.

Pendleton arose with a word of surprised greeting, but it froze upon his lips as his wife confronted him with a flushed and angry face, wet and dishevelled hair and her hat disrespectfully cocked on one ear. In one hand she brandished an umbrella; in the other she waved aloft a crumpled sheet of paper.

Pendleton stood aghast—astonishment— incredulity—alarm written upon his face. Was his decorous Edith losing her mind?

"Edith!" he gasped.

"Don't 'Edith' me!" she screamed, shaking the paper in his face. "How dare you insult—outrage—me in this manner? Didn't you suppose I would see that letter? Do you think I will live under your roof another day? I'm going right home to my mother to-night—now—this very minute—this—" She stopped, breathless and choking with rage.

"Great Scott! Edith," shouted Pendleton. "What is the matter? What letter are you talking about? Are you crazy? Are you ill? What has happened?"

"What letter!" The letter you wrote to Nell, of course."

"I didn't write Nell any letter!"

"You did! you did! I have it here; in your own handwriting. Nell is as much insulted as I am, I'll have you understand, and I left Philadelphia on the first train."

"Let me see the letter!" commanded Pendleton sternly.

She flung it at him, and Tom, with beating heart, whirling brain and parched lips read the following:

"Dear Nell:

"If I can head the old girl off from going down to see you people, as is her present intention, and can escape without her suspecting me, I'll run down to-morrow. Don't let the old gent know, for he would naturally make a roar, and we'll go out and once more tip the glasses in memory of old times."

"I'll tell you, on the side, Nell, my old girl isn't an angel to live with, and I wish now you and I had stuck together and let prospects go to the devil. Life is mighty dull these days, but I never dare to murmur. I think, however, if I can only see you for a day, I'll be able to renew my lease on happiness."

"Devotedly,
"Tom."

"Now deny that you wrote to Nell, if you can!" challenged his wife. "It's too bad your 'old girl' isn't more angelic, but I can remember the time when you thought she was—before she was—ever—fool enough to leave—leave her fa-father's house—" and here a flood of tears rendered Mrs. Pendleton speechless.

"Great heavens, Edith!" cried Pendleton desperately, "don't you know better than to think I would do such a contemptible thing as that? What in the devil would I want to see Nell Hargrove for?"

"For the very reason that you did once before in your life—because you are in love with her!"

"I'm not; never was! There's a horrible mistake somewhere, Edith," he protested, wiping his steaming brow. "Can't you believe me? Have I ever lied to you or deceived you in any way?"

"Look at the writing," commanded his wife tragically, pointing to the letter.

"Don't I know your writing when I see it?" Pendleton looked, and his perplexity was in nowise lessened when he saw that it was exactly like his own—a firm, vertical business hand.

The situation was certainly deplorable. Through some bad blunder or malicious trick he had been placed in a very embarrassing and false position, from which he seemed unable to extricate himself. His wife and his friends believed him guilty of a



breach of faith and decorum, and he knew his wife well enough to feel certain that she would not be placated by mere assurances of his innocence. He must prove it—but how? What if he could not? Then he would go through life the victim of some one else's culpability—his domestic happiness wrecked, and his future clouded.

Several means of extenuation presented themselves; the detective agency—at which his high-born soul shuddered, an appeal to the postal authorities, an affidavit before a notary public that he had never written the treasonable document, had never seen it; yea, had never even *thought* of such a thing until his wife thrust it into his face. He was willing to go to any length to convince her of his loyalty and good intentions.

Mrs. Pendleton, meanwhile, was pacing angrily up and down the room.

mine and will kindly give it to me, I will not intrude longer"—glancing apologetically around the room.

"Certainly, Mr. Page, certainly. I'll ring for the coat immediately, for undoubtedly—quite undoubtedly—I have yours. But I should like to know how it happened. Sit down, please, and tell me."

Page drew a letter out of his pocket.

"This is what led to the discovery." Pendleton took the letter, and saw inscribed thereon, in his wife's handwriting,



Verily, this was an unmistakable "scene." The Pendletons had always felt a contempt for people who would so desecrate domestic peace, and here they were deporting themselves in a manner that would do credit to an Irish brawl.

A servant knocked at the door, and handing Pendleton a diminutive card, announced that the gentleman wanted to see him on important business. The card bore the name, "Mr. Thomas Page." The name was unknown to him, but a light broke suddenly upon the distracted master of the house.

Mrs. Pendleton retired to a far corner and sat down half reluctantly. No matter how great a woman's grievance may be, she dislikes to have the ground of her accusation knocked suddenly from beneath her with one blow of exculpatory evidence.

The servant ushered in the caller.

"I beg your pardon for disturbing you at this unseemly hour," he said, "but I learned about an hour ago that you are the man with whom I exchanged overcoats the other night, and as I am going out of town early in the morning, I was obliged to come to-night."

Then, as Pendleton looked blank, he continued in a rather embarrassed tone: "I—I suppose you have discovered the mistake. We got our overcoats mixed at the club

the name of Mrs. Philip Sydney Hargrove, the insulted friend and hostess.

"When I left the club the other night," continued Page, "I simply took the coat the attendant handed me, without question, and didn't discover until the next morning that I had not my coat, but its counterpart. I made inquiry at the club, but no one could give me any information until to-night. Your friend, Mr. Van Eyeck, happened to know the lady to whom that letter was addressed, and also that she was a friend of yours, suggested you as a possible owner of the coat. It is too bad it happened; for perhaps it has—inconvenienced you?" he ventured hesitatingly.

"No—no; not in the least—not in the least," stammered Pendleton in anything but a reassuring tone. "Only—I believe there was also a letter in your pocket," he added, glancing in the direction of his wife.

Page broke into a hearty laugh. "Yes, there was; quite an important one, too, for the loss of it delayed my trip a day or two and gave me considerable uneasiness."

Pendleton, with an embarrassed air, handed him the mutilated and tear-stained sheet, and there was a distressing pause as Page eyed the missive of woe.

"You see," he said hurriedly, it caused a little misunderstanding. My wife has a friend by the name of Nell, and—"

"Yes, I see how it is," interrupted Page with a smile. "You need not tell me any more. But I think that in self-defence I would better make a little explanation of this letter."

"The person addressed is my brother, Nelson Page—called 'Nell' for short. We are twins, and have lived congenially and inseparably together in M—until a short time ago, when father thought we would be better off apart. We used to have pretty gay times together—too gay, in fact; so father sent me up here to live with my grandmother and set me up in business. Nelson remained at home with him, so we don't see much of each other, which is considerable of a hardship for us. I regret to say that my grandmother is the person to whom I refer as the 'old girl,' which certainly isn't creditable to me, but I didn't suppose that anyone but my brother, who can thoroughly appreciate it, would ever see the letter."

Pendleton accompanied him to the front door—glad to escape from the oppressive atmosphere of the library.

"That did cost me a devil of a lot of trouble," he said ruefully to Page.

"I'll bet it did," answered Page with a laugh. "I took in the whole situation when I saw the letter and I was blamed sorry for you, too, but I hope my explanations have set everything straight. It's a good thing Van Eyeck happened to know your friend."

"A damned good thing!" ejaculated Pendleton fervently, as he shut the front door with a relieved bang.

A letter of explanation was dispatched to the irate Mr. and Mrs. Philip Sydney Hargrove the next day, and while a polite acknowledgment was promptly forthcoming, a request that Mrs. Pendleton return and finish the visit thus abruptly terminated, was, for some reason or other, omitted. In her heart of hearts, however, Mrs. Pendleton ever afterward believed that Mrs. Hargrove's final blow to their friendship was prompted more by suddenly deflated vanity than by a righteous defence of virtue.

Wednesday night. They're just alike you, know."

Edith gave a little suppressed cry from her corner, Tom gasped, and Page smilingly held out a tan melton cloth coat to the bewildered master of the house.

"This is yours, I believe. Is it not?" he added, as Tom still stared. "If you have