

SOMEbody.

Somebody's coming into the world. Somebody's leaving it, somebody weeps; Somebody's bark on life's stream is whirled; Somebody's gayly glides over the deeps. Somebody somewhere is laughing to-night, Somebody's singing while somebody sighs—

THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGERS.

Miss Lydia Davidson was enjoying her cup of tea in her comfortable little house in Ravensbourne one Saturday afternoon, when her friend Miss Newman was announced. The lady was well known for the fervor and energy which she infused into her conduct of what inferior minds may regard as the minor events of life; also for a severity in her attire that may be described by one wishing to deal mildly with it as "gentlewomanlike."

"Dear dear!" murmured Miss Davidson, in vague alarm; "you don't mean it! Tell me all about it, dear Jane." "I will tell you as much as I at present know," returned her friend. "Well, to begin with, when I was coming down from London early last spring, a gentleman and a lady were in the some carriage with me. I took them for a honeymoon couple, and felt sorry to construe their tete-a-tete. They made me most uncomfortable with all the private and confidential things they had to say; and they kept poring over a little book with their heads together—poetry, or some rubbish or other, I suppose. I've no patience with that sort of thing—have you?"

Miss Davidson, was, however, romantic, and could not get up a show or indignation in time to respond to her friend's glance; so she only took a little frown and a blush. "And for six months," Miss Newman continued, "have they been coming, regularly, twice a week—Monday and Thursday. And they may have done it for six years, for I know, because it is only since I have been at my new lodgings, opposite the Bull, that I have noticed them carefully. They arrive early, about 10 o'clock—have some refreshment, I fancy, for they always stop in the hotel a while; then they drive or walk out, not always together—but often take different roads; stay out—oh! till 4, or 5, or 6, and sometimes they have a quantity of luggage, those nice dress-baskets and things, lady-like luggage—and then, after their dinner, off they go toward the railway station."

"Really?" cried Miss Davidson, in astonishment. "And their appearance? Do they look like—"

"Yes, decidedly. Put in Miss Newman, which I am never deceived. The lady dresses exquisitely and most becomingly. They're not young, nor, of course, very old. He is a handsome man with a military air. In fact, I am pretty sure he is an officer, for I saw so much of the military when I lived at Dover, and then, (lowering her voice) "I heard so many sad things about garrison doings that I begin to feel anxious. The Bull is such a respectable hotel it would be quite a misfortune for the town if—if anything unpleasant were to come out," concluded Miss Newman, forced by the vagueness of her subject into, for once, being herself vague.

"Dear me! What you say quite startles me," said Miss Davidson. "If anything like that happens a hundred miles away, or even in London, it is not so bad; but here! It's a shock to me! I must comment on it to Eliza," she added, as that functionary entered, bent most unamiably on interrupting the conference.

"I'll finish my tea," said Miss Newman, putting her fingers firmly on the saucer. "It's an excellent cup—most refreshing, Lydia."

"But, if so, why shouldn't she have her own establishment? Why come to an hotel? objected Miss Newman. "Oh, she shall find out about it some way or another. It's a positive duty, however unpleasant, to clear it up. Perhaps you'll talk it over with your brother tomorrow. I know he sometimes spends Sundays with you, and please let me

know what he thinks. But don't send him to talk about it to me, for it's not a subject I should go into with a young man, unless it was one of the clergy. I am off now to see the curate about it. Our rector resides inquiry, I do believe, for I can't get anything out of him. (Good-bye, Lydia.)

"Good-bye, dear, I'll not ring for Eliza. I'll let you out."

Lydia had scarcely settled herself again after performing this little attention when Eliza appeared, cloaked and bonneted, at the sitting room door, remarking, "I've been out a little while, ma'am. After what you said, just now, my duty was plain; and I went around to Bull at once, knowing as you'd not be wanting me."

"O, dear me, Eliza," returned the doctor's mistress, "I quite forgot that your niece, Mary, is bairned at the Bull. And did you see the land-lady? And can she explain about the strangers?"

"Of course, ma'am, I saw Mrs. Weston," returned Eliza, energetically. "It's what I went for; but I couldn't get nothink out of her. I said to her as civil as possible: 'Will you tell me, Mrs. Weston, the names of those parties as comes here twice a week, a Monday and Thursday?' But she only said, 'very stiff and tight: 'I never give the names of any of my parties, not even to the gentlemen from the Ravensbourne Record.' And more than that she wouldn't say, so at last I came away; but I'll make some excuse to be there next Monday, and I'll see them at all events," and with that Eliza withdrew to her own domain, leaving her mistress to spend the rest of the evening trying to recall all the instances she had heard of morganatic marriages and the like.

Miss Davidson had just taken her seat in church the following morning when Miss Newman, very "tant" and "rim," hurried into a vacant place next to her, and, after burying her face for an instant in her hands, she turned, as she knelt, to her neighbor, and said, in an undertone: "Have you seen your brother to-day? What does he think?"

"No, dear, nor he's not coming; but don't talk about it in church, please don't. And the good lady tried with feeble hurry to find her place. Miss Newman forbore further remark till Mr. Minister Weekly ascended the pulpit. Then she betrayed a longing to speak and an inability to sit still. But Lydia resolutely turned the crown of her bonnet toward her friend fearful that a conversation might again be opened, to the outrage of the decorous feelings of the congregation.

"Woe unto the world because of offenses, for it must needs be that offenses come; but woe unto the man by whom the offense cometh." Or, continued the thin voice of the curate, "as a more literal version, though one less purely English, has it, 'Woe to the world because of scoundrels.'"

"There!" whispered Miss Newman, no longer repressible, "I knew I had done some good with him. I never left him yesterday till his teeth literally chattered. I told him he must do something about the Bull people, and that he was responsible for all the evil that happens in the parish that he could prevent. He'll preach about them."

"Jane, dear Jane, don't!" gasped poor Miss Davidson, and Mr. Weekly began his discourse, which, to Miss Newman's unutterable disappointment, turned on a question of church discipline, the preacher maintaining that those of his clerical brethren who were opposing his own particular view of the matter were clearly of the number of the anathematized referred to in the text.

"Mrs. Farmer," cried Miss Newman, as the congregation streamed out through the lybgate. "One word, I beg."

"Good morning, Miss Newman; I'm so glad to see you," responded pretty little Mrs. Farmer. "I've got so many things to say. You know you asked me to think of a solution for the mysterious Stranger's visit to Ravensbourne. Well, I think, and her pretty lace tie and necktie heaved with emotion, "that the couple have lost a child—a dear little baby perhaps—and that they've buried here, and they've made a vow to visit it's grave."

"What!" said the matter-of-fact Miss Newman; "vow to visit a grave regularly twice a week, on Monday and Thursday! But Mrs. Farmer, I stopped you specially just now to beg you would be with me to-morrow afternoon about 3. My windows command the Bull, and these people never fail to put in an appearance on Mondays; and mind you bring your sister-in-law too, won't you? I am going to ask Miss Brown, Miss Davidson and Mrs. Barton, the new doctor's wife. I am glad you think with me that it is a matter to look into, as a point of duty. You'll promise to come? All right. And the indefatigable Miss Newman started in pursuit of Mrs. Barton.

Miss Newman took care that the strangers should be the subject of many conversations that Sunday. At first, some of the good folk of Ravensbourne declared themselves wholly indifferent to the matter; but finding manifestly absurd explanations started as to the visits of this interesting couple, they criticised the explanations, and in most cases found themselves in the end committed to a theory of their own.

"I may congratulate myself," said Miss Newman that night, as she laid her bonnet upon her pillow—"I may congratulate myself on having raised the question in Ravensbourne to the rank it merits, that of a burning question." And she ran over the points she intended to dwell upon in the speech to be delivered on the morrow, when the ladies assembled in her sitting-room.

Three o'clock on Monday afternoon saw Eliza installed in the bar of the hotel with her niece; while Miss Brown, Miss Davidson, Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Barton, Mrs. Farmer, and four or five other ladies, were assembled at Miss Newman's. After the customary greetings, the hostess said: "Ladies, I have convened this meeting for a special purpose—not, let me explain at once, for the mere gratification of idle curiosity. I have asked you to meet here to con-

sider the suspicious conduct of the visitors to that hotel opposite, and to determine what steps should be taken in their regard. I have my own notion as to what should be done; but I will put that aside until I have received your suggestions. There may be no disgraceful discoveries; but that remains to be proved. My watch warns me, concluded Miss Newman in a different tone, compelling regretfully to excuse some tall sentences. "That if they come back in a fly, and they sometimes do so, they should be here in six minutes; later if they walk. So we have no time to waste. I simply repeat, therefore, what is to be done."

"I must confess, I only came to look at them," said Mrs. Farmer, after a pause. "I haven't any idea what to do," said several voices.

"Would it be of any use to speak to Mrs. Weston, of the hotel?" timidly asked Miss Smith.

"None!" replied Miss Newman, with severity. "That has been tried. You might trust me to try all obvious plans like that."

"And what is the suggestion, Miss Newman, that you said you had to make?" Miss Brown inquired.

"That we should join together to employ a detective!" answered the hostess, with decision. "We must make sure of our facts. I find on inquiry, that the cost of a regular detective would be heavy; but there is an ex-policeman who has been employed on such missions, and his charge would not exceed two guineas a day. In about two days he thinks he could ascertain the residences, occupations, (if any), and much of the past history of the parties."

"We must not get ourselves into any scrape by prying," said Mrs. Barton. "If there is money wanted, we ought to have had some of our men-kind here," Miss Brown objected. "We women are such poor and needy creatures."

But the discussion was suddenly stopped by a cry from Miss Newman of "There they come."

"Why, she's very elegant looking," said one. "There's nothing more aristocratic than a hooked nose; but she must be 35 if she's a day. What a lovely silk she has on!" "Bless me!" said Mrs. Barton. "He's not so military-looking after all. And he's a good 55. But there's an air about him; and as for her, she might be a duchess. Look at the magnificent mantle she has on!"

The Stars.

Venus is morning star during the month. She is slowly approaching the sun, and her superior conjunction, which does not occur until May. But she is still very beautiful in the morning sky, as any one may see who commands a view of the southeastern heavens, and makes an observation an hour before sunrise. She contributes an interesting incident to the planetary annals of the month by her conjunction with Mercury on the 24th, when she acts as guide for those who desire a glimpse of the sparkling planet, who, however, will not deign to show his face unless atmospheric and cloud conditions are the very best. Although Venus and Mercury, as we see them at conjunction, are apparently very near each other, they are in reality far apart. Venus is approaching the sun and moving eastward, being, when in conjunction with Mercury, 22 degrees west of the sun. Mercury is receding from the sun moving westward, and is, when in conjunction, at the same distance from the sun. The former is approaching superior conjunction, the latter is very near western elongation; and yet they seem, as viewed from the earth, to be projected on the sky side by side.

Jupiter is morning star throughout the month. Although thus ranked in astronomical classification, he will be near enough to opposition to be a superb object in the evening sky, being visible nearly the entire night. He now makes his appearance above the horizon at 9 o'clock in the evening in the northeast, and on moonless nights shines forth with exceeding splendor. He remains almost stationary during the whole month, moving a little farther north, and being carried westward for the same reason that the stars are in her orbit. This makes him appear to rise earlier every night, so that, when January closes, he comes looming majestically above the horizon shortly before 7 o'clock. No lover of the stars can help feeling the imposing presence of this leader of the planetary host.

Uranus is morning star. He pursues his slow course without making the least contribution to planetary records. He is leaving the neighborhood of the sun, and consequently drawing near to the earth. He makes slow progress among the stars, for it takes him seven years to pass through a zodiacal constellation.

Neptune is evening star. He pursues his snail-like course just now far away from any of his brother planets. He is thirteen years in passing through a constellation, and therefore it is easy to keep the run of his place in the heavens.

Saturn is evening star. He is second to Jupiter in brilliancy and size, and moves serenely on his celestial path with nothing noteworthy to record concerning his progress. When Jupiter rises in the early part of the month, Saturn is nearly on the meridian, and when Jupiter has reached the zenith, Saturn is sinking below the western horizon. Nothing new has transpired in regard to this fascinating planet, but we have faith that something worth knowing will be revealed concerning the complex Saturnian system before the 27th of September ushers in the long anticipated Saturnian perihelion.

The moon. The first month of the new year holds two full moons in her beautiful hand. The moon falls on the 1st, 26 minutes after midnight; and also, on the 30th, 19 minutes after 11 o'clock in the morning. On the 4th, the moon is in conjunction with Jupiter, and on the 6th with Uranus. On the 13th she pays her respects to Venus, and on the 14th to Mercury. On the 16th she is at her nearest point to Mars, and as this is the day of her change it shows how near Mars is to the sun. Those who watch the course of the moon will find it easy to keep in mind the relative position of the planets.

On the 24th the moon is in conjunction with Neptune, and on the 26th with Saturn. She thus completes her circuit, and at the same time gives the order of succession of the planets, drawing near to the morning stars Jupiter, Uranus, Venus and Mercury, and after her change to new moon swinging her ponderous sphere near the evening stars, Mars, Neptune and Saturn. These are compensations in things celestial as well as terrestrial. One of these is the full-orbed winter moon as she "runs high" in the heavens and pours over the ice-bound earth a flood of silvery light that makes the winter nights beautiful as a dream.

Madagascar's Topography.

Madagascar consists of a central plateau or highlands rising from 4,000 feet to 5,000 feet above the lowlands of the coast, and from this plateau rise occasional volcanic cones, the highest, Ankaratra, being 8,950 feet above the sea. The volcanoes extend from the northern extremity of the island to the twentieth parallel of south latitude. South of this appear granite rocks, at least as far as twenty-two degrees south latitude. At higher latitudes than this the rocks of the interior are practically unknown to Europeans. To the north of the volcano district of Ankaratra there is a tract of country containing silver, lead, zinc, and copper ores. As regards building stones, besides the granite which is so general, there are vast beds of sandstone and slate between the district of Ankaratra and the fossil regions in the south west of the central plateau. These fossils according to M. Grandier, the recent French traveler of the interior, are referable to the Jurassic system, and comprise remains of hippopotami, gigantic tortoises, and an extinct bird of the ostrich species. The coasts of the country are rich in timber, and it would also appear that the interior is a good mineral field.

A Gay Old Boy.

Among the most interested and active students at the University of Vermont, at Burlington, this term, is an old man with white hair and wrinkled face, but erect and active as any freshman. An interview with a student revealed many interesting facts concerning his aged classmate.

"Why, is it possible you haven't heard of him?" was the reply to the reporter's inquiry. "That's the Rev. Mr. Wilder; he's a rara avis, I can tell you; just back to finish his course, which was interrupted in 1831. He was a member of the class of '22, but was obliged to leave the University on account of some trouble in his father's family."

"He must be seventy-five years of age?"

"Seventy-five! Well, I should say he was. He has just passed his eighty-third birthday; but he puts up like sixty."

"What degree is this youthful student working for?"

"I think he has not arrived at a definite conclusion as to that; he is prospecting as it were. He visits the room of nearly every Professor in the University at intervals, and makes it mighty interesting for them. He feels young but he has all the conceit of his years, and while in the normal attitude of a pupil he occasionally assumes the roll of instructor. As a consequence the Professors are often placed in embarrassing situations. But the old gentleman means all right; he is thoroughly good at heart, and they know it would grieve him to interfere with him, so rather than hurt his feelings they submit quietly, and then most of the time he is as dutiful as could be desired, and pays the strictest attention to the study in hand. He is as enthusiastic over his work as the most ambitious boy could be, and never tires of talking about it."

"Where are his people, or hasn't he any friends?"

"Oh, yes he has children married and living in Charlotte, and he has a sister living in Connecticut, who has attained a very high social position. Mr. Wilder has lived for a number of years at Charlotte, but last fall he announced his intention of coming to the University to complete his course. His wife, who I think is his third, then went to California on account of her health. I understand he has had a great deal of sickness and trouble in his family. After his wife went West Mr. Wilder came here and engaged rooms and board, and has been here ever since. He is conscientious and all that, but he can stand more harmless fun than any boy in the University. He is sure to be present at every entertainment that comes along, and if there are any games he is foremost and the most enthusiastic participant. The young folks take pains to see that he has every opportunity for enjoying himself and he does it, too. Why, the other night he took in two socials running, and came out the next day as spry as a bird. At one of them they played drop the handkerchief, and he was the liveliest player in the game. Then, too, he very frequently visits the rink. There is to be a grand march at the rink to-night, I'll warrant you'll be there, and if you want to see him skate just drop around."

The Coming Royal Visitor.

Prince Albert Victor, eldest son of the Prince of Wales, was 21 years of age on January 8th 1885. His attainment of his majority were celebrated, after which he will visit on this continent and acquaint himself in some measure with the United States and Canada.

Queen Victoria, his worthy grandmother, continues to be in good health, generally speaking, and may live many years yet, even long enough to survive the Prince of Wales, who is said to be possessed of the belief that he will never be king of Great Britain and Ireland. His heir, and falling the Prince of Wales, the heir to the crown, is the young prince to be with us shortly, who, whether his grim apprehension will prove true or not, will almost certainly become the ruler of an empire comprising a population considerably exceeding three millions of souls.