

The Home Reading Circle

"THE MELANCHOLY JAQUES."

On leaving Cambridge, Eustace Davenport had entered the office of an architect and a few years later started in business on his own account in the provincial town of Waverester.

Waverester was a growing place, hence its selection, and already Eustace had secured the building of a church, besides some less important commissions. He rented a house in a sedate thoroughfare off High street, the ground floor being used as an office.

"Surely, then," Bertha asked, in a peculiar tone of voice, "you did not let the matter end there?" "I had no such intention. But fate was against me. Her father was an invalid; restless, unable to settle down anywhere. When I called at the address he had given me in London—it was a lodging house in Suffolk street, Pall Mall—I heard they had called for New York. From that day to this I have heard nothing."

"But you won't learn the address of Miss Andrews in that case." "I know." "Do you mean—do you mean you do not wish to hear where she lives?" "Yes," he said, "that is what I mean."

"Because I was the instrument—I was to be the means of bringing you together again," said Bertha. "Simply because you were yourself, and I loved you."

He laughed a little nervously. "I know," he said; "believe me, I realize the awkwardness of my position. But I know that I have loved you almost since the first day I saw you."

He was a somewhat grave-looking man of 30; tall, well-proportioned, dark-haired, handsome, but a certain taciturnity could not be denied to him, and his aloofness had dissipated the expectations naturally formed in such a place from the advent of a man, still far from middle-aged, unmarried, good-looking and prosperous.

"The letter only bore the local postmark." "Then you think that this—this person, in whom you are deeply interested, is actually living in the town." "I think," he said, "that she wrote those twaddling lines."

"You scarcely pay her a compliment, Mr. Davenport." "The note is not necessarily the author of them," he answered. "The originators of the thing probably desired to remain unknown. They may have asked some one else to copy the verses. It is a matter of great importance to me, to find out how they were written."

"I shall be immensely indebted to you." Bertha could not help thinking it was a somewhat unthankful task he had put upon her. For the first time in her life she felt acutely jealous. She began to cherish a dislike for Miss Andrews, coupled with something like resentment against Eustace.

"And," cried Eustace, "the friend was Muriel." "Yes, Mr. Davenport; the friend was Muriel. It makes the world seem a small place, doesn't it?" Her father is dead. He died in New York two years ago.

"I shall come if you will let me, dear. I can only tell you that you are the one woman in the world whom I desire to be my wife."

"You are going to look after the new church, of course," she said. "How quickly it is getting on." They turned away from the gate of the Hollies side by side.

"I rather want an opportunity to speak to you," he remarked, and for a moment Bertha's face grew crimson. "Then," she returned, "it is fortunate I chanced to come out so early. But it is a glorious morning. We usually get a foretaste of spring in February."

"I am immensely pleased," he cried. "Why should you be pleased?" she demanded. "I wonder whether you will despise me very much if I tell you!"

"That is what I feel a difficulty in explaining," he said. "Yet it is precisely what I wish to explain. When I received that miserable valentine, when I saw the handwriting I was at first bewildered. Then I seemed to live through the past again. In your presence, I ceased to think of it."

"There is a story going the rounds," says an old observer to the Washington Star, "that does injustice to the memories of President Lincoln and his secretary of the navy, Gideon Welles. According to the story, Mr. Lincoln being asked why he had selected Mr. Welles as secretary of the navy when he was only a Hartford lawyer, replied by asking, 'What else are they good for?'"

"I have not promised," she answered. "He took her hands, drawing her gently toward him. "Promise now," he whispered, clasping his arms around her. "Yes," she said, just loud enough for Eustace to hear.—Household Words.

"I am growing rather curious," Bertha exclaimed, nervously. "The fact is," he explained, "I received something this morning; a valentine, I suppose it was meant for a ridiculous thing!"

"I suppose," she remarked, "there are some anxieties too deep for words." "My father came home about 5," he said. "Then I shall get to the Hollies at 3.30, if that is not too early."

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"What a dreadful nonsense!" said Bertha, with a laugh. "However, you will never be able to resist such an appeal!"

"It is immensely good of you—" "That is the least you can say, Mr. Davenport. But, as a fact, it was rather bad. I must pledge you to secrecy before I can go any further."

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"Not to me!" she exclaimed. "I hoped that it might be. Of course,

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