

WHAT DOES IT MATTER?

Wealth and glory, and place and power,
What are they worth to me or you?
For the lease of life runs out in an hour,
And death stands ready to claim his due;
Sounding honors or heaps of gold,
What are they all when all is told?
A pain or a pleasure, a smile or a tear—
What does it matter which we claim?
For we step from the cradle into the bier,
And a careless world goes on the same.
Hours of gladness or hours of sorrow,
What does it matter to us to-morrow?
Truth of love, or vow of friend—
Tender caresses or cruel sneers—
What do they matter to us in the end?
For the brief day dies, and the long night nears.
Passionate kisses, or tears of gall,
The grave will open and cover them all.
Homeless vagrant, or honored guest,
Poor and humble, or rich and great,
All are racked with the world's unrest,
All must meet with the common fate.
Life from childhood till we are old,
What is all when all is told?

HOW IT HAPPENED.

'I do not believe it!' said Mrs. Grant emphatically.
'But what everybody says must be true,' persisted Mrs. Jeffrey.
'By no means,' said Helen Grant.
'Once everybody said the earth was flat, now we all know it is round.'
'Speak for yourself,' retorted Mrs. Jeffrey. 'I don't know its round, but I'm willing to believe it on good evidence. Thank heaven I'm not so stubborn that I won't believe, I'm one of the sort that can be convinced of a thing even if I don't see it.'
'Mrs. Grant flashed a little, and tears came to her eyes.
'She is my friend and I love her dearly,' she said. 'She has fault—every one can see that—but this cannot believe it! Oh, Jeffrey, can you not see that it is a matter of conscience with me as well as with you?'
'Mrs. Jeffrey a little assumed but of the same opinion still, rose to go.
'If the matter is brought up in church, you will then hear all the evidence. After you see the letter you may change your mind.'
'Pine Falls was convulsed over the first scandal. The tongue of censure, that had faintly reproved when Abram Harris had carried his mother off to the parsonage, and indulged in audible criticisms when Laura Cowles had been baptised in the river and died of indomitable rheumatism a week afterward; had now broken silence and carried the story from house to house until it was on everybody's lips.
'A mania for visiting seemed to have broken out among the ladies. Half a dozen could be seen any day, with a little bundle of knitting crochets, work in hand, going to make informal visits or calls at the homes of their intimate friends or near neighbors. To be sure each lady was very particular to explain, if opportunity afforded, that she had promised Mrs. So-and-so a new stitch or pattern, or she had seen intending to take her work and run in to see Mrs. So-and-so for six months or more. It was really a shame to neglect one's neighbors so.
'Mrs. Jeffrey and Mrs. Martin were seated on the back porch of the Jeffrey mansion, engaged in earnest and confidential conversation. Overhead in the apple tree the robin sang unheard. On the floor a mischievous kitten played with Mrs. Martin's ball of zephyr, tangling the thread unheeded while her crochets work lay idly in her lap.
'She always did seem frivolous to me,' remarked Mrs. Jeffrey. 'No care of her house, no interest in domestic matters. There's a great deal said in these days about a woman's hiding a God-given talent under a bushel, and another her genius under domestic drudgery; but I've noticed that the women who are domestic and take an interest in their homes are not the women who figure in scandalous cases or elopement.'
'Perhaps,' replied Mrs. Martin, who was not so conservative as her neighbor, 'there's a great deal of human nature in women as well as men. Most of them take an interest in

some one thing besides house-keeping. With some it is painting with others music, others fancy work or religion. I've known women who were really dissipated, you might say, in religious work; they carried it to such unreasonable lengths—You and I, not being gifted in any of these directions, have gone on in plain, quiet home life. But we must not on that account, find fault with those who see life from a different standpoint or call them frivolous because they take an interest in things we don't care for. Mrs. Downs was always fond of dress and fancy work, but until this story came out everybody seemed to like her.'
'Well, you can say what you please,' returned Mrs. Jeffrey, wrathfully 'when a woman behaves herself she won't be talked about. The most shameful part of the whole affair is her assumed innocence. I saw her myself walking the streets with Mr. Colton only last evening, cool as you please. If there's a man in this village that I pity it's Jack Downs.'
'The next day was Sunday, and the minister, Mr. Snow, looked around at the rapidly filling pews with a feeling of calm complacency. Every face wore a look of keen expectancy, and when Jack Downs entered with his pretty wife, significant looks were exchanged and a suppressed sensation was visible throughout the audience.
'Youthful and pretty, she added to these attractions by a taste in dress that was simply perfect. As she came slowly up the aisle twirling her fan nonchalantly, whispered comments passed from one to another.
'How brazen! Did you ever see such effrontery?' murmured Mrs. Dorr to Mrs. Cowles.
'She's a plucky little piece!' said Mr. Martin to his wife, in a tone in which surprise was so evidently flavored with admiration, that his better half bestowed on him a glance of withering reproach.
'What audacity!' said Mrs. Brown to her daughter Cora.
'But that young lady, who rejoiced in the title of Mrs. Snow's village postess, was wrapped in post-contemplation. She knew that Mrs. Downs had fallen under public disapprobation because of a love letter that had been found by some one, addressed to her and in Mr. Colton's handwriting.
'O her people saw the reprehensible marriage first accepting professions of love from a gentleman acquaintance. Not so, Miss Cora. This Byronian state of affairs did not so much shock her moral sensibilities, as it presented a theme for her muse to portray the agonies of misdirected affection. Viewing the whole matter simply as an abstraction she surreptitiously drew out her human book and slyly penciled on the margin:
'Let the cold world deride me,
I will but love the more,
Whatever fate betide thee—
Here she stopped, the only rhyme that suggested itself being 'ignore.' Straggling with the situation, she had just changed the line, 'I will not shed thy gore,' to 'My heart but can adore,' when she was recalled to herself by the sound of Mr. Snow's voice as he finished reading the usual list of notices.
'A most painful circumstance having arisen, that seriously affects us as a community as well as a congregation, since it compromises the good names of two of our members, I feel it a duty to afford an opportunity for a full explanation. This congregation is invited to meet at the parsonage to-morrow evening at 8 o'clock. I hope that every member of this congregation will be present.'
'After that it mattered little whether the sermon was a marvel of brilliancy or the dullest disquisition that ever bored a long suffering audience. No one paid the slightest attention to it, except old Mayor Dorr, who was so deaf that he only caught about one word in ten, and had thus missed this story of the love-letter to Mrs. Downs.
'After the conclusion of the services, Mrs. Cowles, Mrs. Brown, Mrs. Martin, and Jeffrey stopped in the aisle for a moment's conference.
'I shall take Benfrice Conci out of the school,' said Mrs. Jeffrey. 'No child of mine shall be under the instructions of a teacher who writes love-letters to a married woman.'
'And to think that Mr. Snow

should attempt to cover it up and exonerate it! Padded Mrs. Cowles, 'I don't know but we shall be obliged to withdraw from the church. My husband thinks there is a great deal of corruption among ministers themselves nowadays.'
'Certainly no one was better able to detect corruption anywhere than Mr. Cowles, if half the stories of his own immoral escapades could be relied upon. But Mrs. Cowles' friends remained discreetly silent on this point.
'I shall not allow Cora to go to the parsonage to-morrow evening,' interposed Mrs. Brown. 'I think the discussion of such subjects has a most demoralizing effect on young people. It is a deplorable affair all around.'
'But when the evening came Cora did go. More than that, to her mother's great horror, she crossed the room and sat down by Jack Downs and his wife, who sat alone together on the sofa, although a great many were standing up around the large parlors.
'This was not much from sympathy with Mrs. Downs, as a professional instinct such as that which impels a surgeon to investigate all sorts of pathological monstrosities. She wanted to observe for herself the ravages of remorse, humiliation and unhappy love, the better to finish her poem.
'But Mrs. Downs was as pretty, as gay and as nonchalant as ever. Once or twice she whispered behind her fan to her husband, and once she actually laughed, which so outraged the sensibilities of the more severely virtuous matrons that they shuddered with horror.
'Mr. Colton was a young-looking young man, with wavy hair, and a look of a red-eyed rover. He had lately come to Pine Falls a teacher, and now stood leaning against the mantel, his romantic appearance, so attractive to the ladies, was due to his hair, which he wore long on account of his ears, they being enormously large, and an interesting pallor which was caused by dyspepsia, and not, as many of the young ladies supposed.
'I have here,' said Mrs. Row, a letter which has been a theme of much severe comment. The envelope is addressed to Mrs. Downs, and it was picked up in the street by Mrs. Martin's little son, who took it to his father's grocery. The contents are in a different penmanship with Mrs. Colton's name as a signature. I will ask Mr. Colton to make an explanation, which will no doubt be satisfactory.'
'Satisfactory?' repeated Mr. Cowles, with more spirit than politeness. 'It seems to me that when a man writes in that style to another man's wife calling her husband a base wretch!—here he cast an indignant glance at Jack Downs—and urging her to run away with him a satisfactory explanation is not an easy matter.'
'You are mistaken, sir,' answered Mr. Colton. 'An explanation in this case is very easily made. I am a member of an amateur theatrical club and I wrote out my part at Mr. Downs' one evening, copying it out of a book of his. Mrs. Downs gave me an envelope, from one of the letters that lay open the table to put the manuscript in, and I unfortunately lost it on my way home. I will now read the lines if Mr. Cowles will look over the printed pages and see if I read it correctly.'
'Shamefaced Mr. Cowles looked on while Mr. Colton read, with much dramatic effect:
'My angel fly with me
Afar in other lands beyond the sea
I'll build a home sacred to love and thee.
Scorn the base wretch who in your humble home
Profanes the name of love—ah, by my own!
And heaven is not so high, nor earth so vast
But that its treasures at thy feet I'll cast.
There is a full page of it, with my name signed at the bottom, but this will suffice. I think,' and Mr. Colton coolly sat down while a look of consternation went around the room.
'Mrs. Downs went up to Helen Grant and kissed her.
'Thank you, dear, for your faith in me. I heard all about it, and I'll never forget it as long as I live.'
'She looked so gentle and girlish in her dainty white caperines, with that look of childish gratitude in her blue eyes, that kindhearted Mrs.

Jeffrey went and put her mother's arms around her, and said, with tears in her eyes:
'Forgive me—forgive us all, won't you?'
'Jack answered for her:
'She forgives you, we both forgive you, neighbors and friends; but if any man repeats such stuff again, about his wife or any other woman, I'll give him warning here and now that it will afford me infinite pleasure to give him a sound thrashing.'
'And that was the last of a great scandal at Pine Falls.
Nuns Who Never See a Man.
The Via Merulana Convent, in Rome, will remain in the possession of the nuns until the draft of the last of them, when the property will go to the city. The sixteen remaining Franciscan nuns, who are called the Sepiate Vire, are still in old monastery, where they once received a visit from the Princess of Wales. These nuns, some of them ladies of noble families, observe a very strict rule. Once entering the convent they never leave it alive. They never see men not even the priest who says mass in the chapel. The altar is screened off and they can just see the elevation of the Host. Through a small aperture they receive holy communion from grates, and a luncheon which they make cooking, but spend never address any eye, and keep, in a separate building, a very strict rule. Once entering the convent they never leave it alive. They never see men not even the priest who says mass in the chapel. The altar is screened off and they can just see the elevation of the Host. 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