

MA'MOISELLE.

By Florence L. Guertin.

THERE are figures that the world sees tripping along the uneven road of life in a flippant, irresponsible fashion, their twinkling feet barely touching the ground, their buoyant spirits always in the blue ether. The rough places, when met, are skimmed over, and do not retard them. The brambles that scratch and bruise other pilgrims are lightly brushed aside or deftly dodged. Their whole life seems one gala day. But unless they are cut down in the heyday of their youth, there comes a time when pitfalls are met, too wide to be nimbly leaped; when obstacles are encountered that cannot be lightly surmounted; when blows fall too heavy to be escaped, crushing them entirely or developing character that had remained latent; character whose existence by most people was not suspected, and that astounds us by its strength and sweetness; character capable of self denial and even heroic self sacrifice.

"Ma'moiselle" was such a butterfly. She flitted from flower to flower in her own dainty fashion, absorbing what sweetness and pleasure she could from each, and casting the blossom aside when she had deprived it of what had been the best it contained. She was a butterfly that pleased the eye and ornamented the landscape, but one that caused the passer by to shake his head and ask what the end would be. Could she go on in that way forever? Would life always yield her honey, unmixed with gall? Would she ever become serious, less selfish, less flippant? Would she ever marry and settle down? Or, if she did not, would she grow old, as other women did, or forever remain distractingly young and irresponsible as she was now?

Ma'moiselle was no longer a young

girl, people said. At twenty eight it was time that a woman should long since have been at the head of a house, the mother of a growing brood. But Ma'moiselle shook her head and said that she really wouldn't care for it; that she was just beginning to find out how to enjoy herself; that she loved her freedom, her liberty, her good health, her ability to relish the flavor of all things, too much to exchange them for any uncertainty.

The unkind ones said that the real reason was that she loved all men too much to marry one; that she was a disgraceful little flirt, and that they pitied the man who really did win her. And they could not forgive her the fact that, in spite of her frivolity and general undesirableness in their eyes, there were a number of men who were undoubtedly willing, and even anxious, to accept the position of husband to Ma'moiselle, and be led by her the dance that they predicted.

It was Josiah Dalrymple who christened her "Ma'moiselle." She had some French blood in her; and being rather proud of the fact, she did her best to accentuate it. It was hardly an affectation, for her tastes were innately French. She had developed the habit, when a child, of giving an expressive and decidedly foreign little shrug to her shoulders. She could speak the language, too, it being the one study to which she had paid any serious attention, and she loved to chatter it. Dalrymple said that she reminded him of a picture he had once seen in the Paris Salon; a figure in fancy dress, that might have served as a model for "Folly," but was simply catalogued "Portrait of a Young Lady;" and ever afterwards he had called Elise Coudert "Ma'moiselle."

Dalrymple was about as little like a butterfly as she was like a grub. It had fallen to his lot to be one of the toilers of the world, and though still a young man he had won a place and name for himself by his own untiring efforts. He was serious by nature and upright through principle. He believed thoroughly in the gospel of hard work, and knew that success worth having would not come easily. His life was earnest, his purpose unflinching, his amusements few. Ma'moiselle was among the latter. When he had had a particularly trying day, down town, it rested him to drop in, on his way to his rooms, at Mrs. Coudert's attractive home. The drawing room was always light and airy—anything heavy and severe being excluded by Ma'moiselle, whom Mrs. Coudert never opposed; and he could generally have a little chat with Ma'moiselle herself. It was sure not to be a drain on his intellect, while his eye was gratified by the tasteful surroundings, and his ear amused by the conversational twitter, although of Ma'moiselle herself his reason did not always approve. It refreshed him even to scold her, presuming as he often did upon his old acquaintance and the friendship he had had with her brother, now married and living far away.

He went up the steps to her house one afternoon, unusually depressed, on account of business complications, and met young Waterbury coming out. Waterbury was a tall, smooth faced, manly looking fellow, with features like those cut in a cameo, but now pale and set. He went by Dalrymple with an unsmiling nod, and the latter passed into the house.

Ma'moiselle was still in the drawing room, with a countenance that told no tales, but was as serene and fresh as usual. It was absurd, he thought, that she should look so young; and it made him angry to find her so smiling and unruffled when he thought of the despair that he had read in the eyes of the man just gone out.

"What have you been doing to that boy?" he asked, after he had shaken hands and drawn a chair up near to her.

She laughed, and flushed a little as she replied:

"Nothing, O father confessor, except to tell him how foolish he was. Tea?" she asked questioningly, turning to the cups on the low table beside her, and picking up a thin slice of lemon with the tongs.

"No, thanks," he said shortly; "you know that I hate the stuff. I only take hot lemonade when I have a cold."

Ma'moiselle scored one word in her small mind. It was "grumpy," so she waxed more amiable herself. She moved her chair back a little and faced him. Putting two small feet, in ridiculously pointed, high heeled slippers, on a low footstool in front of her, she let her head rest on the back of her chair and her hands drop, in a resigned fashion, into her lap.

"What is it, Josiah?" she asked, looking at him in a quizzical way—she always called him Josiah when she wanted to tease him—"what is troubling your soul now?"

He got up and commenced to pace the floor, before replying. Then he leaned against the mantelpiece and looked down at her. She felt that he was in one of his most disapproving moods, but glanced up at him innocently.

"I was thinking of young Waterbury," he said, quite seriously. "I am sorry for him."

She turned her head a little uneasily.

"For being so foolish?" she asked, gazing up at the ceiling.

"No," he replied; "he couldn't prevent that. But you might have done so. Why did you not tell him that he was foolish at the beginning of the winter? Why did you let him play the devoted knight to you, going about with you and seeing you day after day, becoming wrapped up in you, only to be told in the end that he was 'foolish'?"

"Because, my dear Josiah"—with unusual sweetness—"you can't tell a man not to fall in love with you, before you are sure that he is going to do it; and after that—well"—with one of the characteristic little shrugs, and a smile that showed her even white teeth—"it's generally too late."

Then, changing to a more plaintive key, she said:

"Don't be disagreeable today, Jo; you know how I dislike disagreeable conversations. And don't stand leaning there, looking down at me as if you were a preacher and I the sinner. I know that I'm frivolous, I know I'm vain—fond to distraction of attention, even. You see I admit it all, so you can't argue with me. I assure you I agree with you. I am quite hopeless. Now sit down"—as he smiled a little—"and be pleasant, and let's drop that tiresome boy. Isn't he handsome, though? What a nose, and what shoulders! I could almost adore him."

Dalrymple dropped wearily into the chair near her.

"I think that I *will* have some tea," he said; "I am tired."

"What? Change your mind weakly, like any woman?" she exclaimed joyously, delighted to think that she had diverted him.

He leaned his head on his hand and watched her fingers fluttering about among the tea-things. They were white, with the pinkest of nails, and fairly glittered with rings. He thought she wore too many rings. He had often told her so; but they were the one ornament in the way of jewelry of which she was prodigal.

"I could not live without them," she had once said, holding her palms out with the ten jeweled digits extended in front of her and gazing at them fondly. "They are a moral support to me, really, just as good clothes are, you know. Perhaps you don't understand that, either, but that's because you're not a woman. I love my rings, and really don't believe I could exist without them. They mean so much to me. I love them for the fire they contain, for the sparkle that they give out. If I feel downcast, I move my hands about, and the rings glisten and seem to say, 'Cheer up; there is light and life in me,' and I brighten immediately. They amuse me," she went on, looking down at them again. "This ruby was once a drop of blood in the heart of a carrier pigeon who was bearing a letter from a

knight to his lady fair. But at the end of the journey, an arrow sent by an unerring hand pierced him through, and he fell dead at her feet. She picked him up tenderly, and a drop of his blood crystallizing on her hand, a new stone was created, called pigeon's blood ruby.

"This sapphire is a hexagon cut from a bit of clear Venetian sky. This emerald is a part of the crest of a wave, and the diamonds around it are its foam. And the opal—my dearly beloved opal, maligned for centuries of foolish superstition—is the sea and the sky combined, the fierce flame of the fire and the delicate tint of the sea shell; the strongest and palest colors of nature, fighting for supremacy. That is a stone that is alive—that is the one I love most. My rings are a part of me. I could not give them up. Vulgar, you think, to wear so many? Perhaps so; but at any rate I don't pile on other jewelry. I never could bring myself to be barbarian enough to punch holes in my ears, not even to hang thousand dollar diamonds from them; and as for bracelets, I despise them!" and she held up two round arms, letting the lace from her puffed sleeves fall back to the elbow, showing how bare of ornament the arms were—and how very tapering as well.

"How long have I known you, Ma'moiselle?" Dalrymple asked, as he leaned forward and took the cup she held out to him.

"Eleven years," she replied. "What an age! Don't tell me you remember how old I was then."

"But I do," he replied, smiling a little in his slow way. "I remember perfectly. Eleven years——" He sipped the tea and seemed to be thinking. "And how many lovers have you had since then, Ma'moiselle?"

"How do I know?" she replied, pushing the footstool away somewhat impatiently, feeling that the coming lecture had not been averted after all.

"No, you couldn't be expected to remember, of course," he said; "but I think I do. I have been a spectator, you know. When I first knew you, you were only a child, but you were very

much as you are now. There were dangles even then. The first that I recall were young Winslow and old Howard. They were always hanging around you. Then there was that English chap who blushed so, and the titled Italian whom we all hated because he looked like Mephistopheles. And that awfully nice fellow—Babcock, wasn't it?—who had it worse than some do, and who left so suddenly and went ranching. They say," he went on, looking thoughtfully down into his cup, "that he has—gone to the dogs since."

"Well," she said feebly, "could I help it? I could not make myself love him."

"No," he replied; "of course you couldn't help it. You good women never are to blame for anything. You never drive a man to drink or to folly and ruin. It is always *his* fault if he does any of these things through love of you. You never take a young boy and let him grow to care for you, to make you his ideal, to fairly worship you, only to be laughed at in the end. You never start him in life with false and bitter ideas of women because *one* has disappointed him. You irreproachable women never break men's hearts or wreck their lives. It is always their own fault, you say. There are some sins, Ma'moiselle," he said, speaking very slowly, "that are not down in the decalogue and yet are crimes."

"And by all this you mean," she said quite lightly, "that I am one of the criminals?"

"I mean that you are one of the irreproachable women," he answered, looking at her seriously. "You have been born with a charm—a power to please—I don't know what it is, but I have watched it work destruction for eleven years. You are not the prettiest woman I know, Ma'moiselle, nor yet the most intellectual, but you are the most fascinating, and——"

"Thank you," she interrupted drily. "It was fitting that you should administer that sugar pill after being so brutally frank."

"I am afraid that I feel like being still more frank," he continued; "and perhaps I do not choose my words happily. But I felt sick at heart when I saw that boy at the door, and knew so well what had happened. Where is he now, and what do you suppose he will do tonight?"

"It is not as serious as you think it is," she said gently. "He will get over it."

"Yes," he agreed; "he will get over it. They all do, in time. But the getting over it, ma'moiselle; you don't know what that means. Irreproachable women never do."

"If it was not I that he cared for, it would be some one else," she said in self defense, throwing her hands apart. "How many men marry their first loves?"

"More than you think," he answered; "and I can't see how that argument helps matters much. It doesn't do any good to tell a man who has had small-pox, and whose face is badly scarred, that he might have had it much worse. And though he gets over the disease, he carries the scars, you know, to the grave."

"And you think that I give people emotional smallpox?" she said, gazing down at her priceless rings and turning them around.

"I think that you are one of the irreproachable women," he repeated again. "I don't know any one who can do more harm than an attractive, frank, heartless, good woman. Her frankness disarms men and wins them to her. She seems so sincere—and the rest is easy enough. But she simply plays with them for her own amusement. The desire for lovers is as strong within her as the taste for drink in some men. She moves their strongest emotions, while she never has a flutter above admiration for a straight nose or a godlike physique. She knows her power and finds a fascination in exercising it. It becomes, in time, meat and drink to her, and she goes on for years with no other aim in life than to gratify it. And the end is"—He hesitated a moment.

"Go on," she said coldly. "The

end, Josiah, is what I have been hoping for ever since you began."

"The end is," he said, "that this woman is generally caught in her own snares. She at last finds out that after all she, too, has a poor thing called a heart that is not as lifeless as she thought it. She learns what it is to love and to suffer."

"You mean—?" Ma'moiselle said, leaning forward in her chair, her hands tightly clasped, the color and brightness gone from her face.

"I mean that she at last meets some one to whom she does not in the least appeal; some one on whom all of her wiles are lost; some who one does not care for her. She inspires polite indifference, the most maddening thing in the world—that is all."

If he had brought a lash down on her shoulders he could not have stung her more. She rose quickly and went to the window, standing with her hands still closely clasped in front of her, looking out at the placid passers by. It was some time before she spoke.

"I am trying to think whether I shall take the trouble to answer you or not," she said at last. "You have gone farther than you have ever gone before, and I have let you. I had a morbid curiosity to be present at my own dissection. I am glad to know what you really think of me. But I hate such conversations! I hate such scenes! I am not given to making long speeches, and, as you told me, I am not clever. But whatever my faults are, saying unpleasant things is not among them. Flattery may be part of my wiles, but at least it never hurts. I feel," she said, turning toward him and passing her hand wearily over her forehead—"I feel at least ten years older than I did when you first began."

She leaned a little on a table near her, and his heart smote him, she looked so frail and childish. "Perhaps it is all true, what you have said. Perhaps I am what you think. But what do you know of a woman's heart? What do you know of her inner life and motives? Simply what you observe, and what she is pleased to tell you. Because she does

not wear her heart on her sleeve, or surrender it to some man, are you justified in thinking that she is without one? How do you know that she has not suffered? How do you know that her frivolous life is not an effort to hide it? What right have you to predict pain for her, when—?"

She turned away, unable to finish. Dalrymple gazed at her, aghast. Her slender frame was trembling, and for the first time he saw that her eyes looked pained and earnest. He hardly supposed her capable of expressing any emotion save almost childish joy or pleasure; yet now, as he looked at her, he felt as if he had laid bare her quivering soul. He took one step toward her, and held out his hand.

"Ma'moiselle," he said softly, "forgive me."

The front door opened, and in an instant the portières leading from the hall were parted, as Mrs. Coudert entered the room. Dalrymple dropped his hand, and turned to greet her. He did not see Ma'moiselle alone after that, and soon took his departure.

As he stepped into the open air he drew a long, deep breath, and almost doubted the reality of the scene he had had with Ma'moiselle. He was glad that Mrs. Coudert had come in just when she did, before he had had time to take back those cruel, truthful things. It had been the hardest task of his life, but he was glad that he had had the strength to say them. It had settled one thing in his mind. She cared for some one else. She had suffered—she, who never seemed to have a care or a serious thought. It was some one whom perhaps she had known in her early youth—some one whom she had sent away and regretted; some one whom she had found out too late that she loved.

Ma'moiselle in love! Ma'moiselle married! He could not imagine such a thing. He had schooled himself to say that for a friend—a recreation—she was charming; but for a wife—he could imagine no greater folly. What did she know of duty and self sacrifice? He almost laughed at the thought of connecting the terms with her. He walked

along quickly toward his club, and tried to tell himself that he had done right; but Ma'moiselle's eyes, no longer laughing, but dark, with a hurt, pained look in them, haunted him. The sweet, plaintive voice rang in his ears. "What do you know of a woman's heart?" it asked; and he could not still it.

A few days later the worst that he had dreaded for his business came upon him. Every day chronicled fresh failures, and in one of the crashes he saw the enterprise that he had given years to building up, totter and fall like a house of cards; the money he had toiled to amass melt before his eyes. In the opinion of the world he was a ruined man, everything—save honor—gone.

There was nothing to do but to begin again. This he preferred to undertake in another city. He settled his affairs as best he could, and prepared to leave town. He had some money, left him by his mother, and he intended to travel a little before he decided where to locate and again begin the battle of life.

He postponed his good by to Ma'moiselle until the last. He had not seen her since that day when, he now felt, he had presumed—when he had touched upon a wound where he supposed there was nothing but callousness.

She came down in a clinging gown of palest heliotrope, and nestled back among the cushions at one end of the couch. She said that she had not been feeling well; that she certainly must be getting old, for she was developing nerves. And she played with a little gold smelling bottle, holding it occasionally to her nostrils. It was one of her airs, she told him; she never had been known to faint in her life, but simply liked the smell of it. Then there was a little pause in which he felt conscious and constrained, yet could not tell why.

"I am going away, Ma'moiselle," he said at last, looking away from her, "and I could not bear to go without apologizing—without telling you how sorry I am—you understand—for what I said last time."

"Yes," she replied, smiling; "I understand. It was quite tragic, wasn't

it? You will let us hear from you—mother and me? We shall be anxious to know what you are doing."

It was plain that she did not wish to talk of that last conversation, and he became more uneasy than ever. He had wanted to say so much about his repentance, but felt that he had been cut off. He sat and gazed quite stupidly at her hands as they played with the vinaigrette, wondering what made them look so different. They were as white as ever, the nails were as carefully manicured, but—they did not seem like the hands of Ma'moiselle.

He had it at last. The fingers did not wear a ring; and he had never seen her without rings before.

"Your hands look strange, Ma'moiselle," he said. "Your rings—part of you, you know—where are they?"

A wave of color rose, dyeing her throat and face. It filled him with amazement. He sprang to his feet, a sudden thought seizing him. Thrusting his hand deep into his pocket, he drew out a draft, signed by the cashier of a well known bank, but sent to him anonymously. He had not had time to trace it, and did not intend to use it, but believed that some business friend, wishing to help him, had sent it. He gazed now with horror from the slip of paper to the little, ringless hands of Ma'moiselle, then into the eyes that no longer met his, but drooped guiltily.

"Ma'moiselle," he said sternly.

The small hands went up to the face, covering the hot cheeks.

"Ma'moiselle," he repeated less severely, but with reproach in his tones.

Still there was no reply, but the pillows shook, and he knew that she was crying. The next time that he said "Ma'moiselle," it was from his knees beside her, where he gently took the little palms from her face, and looked into her eyes with the lashes all wet. Then he dropped his head on the unadorned fingers, and kissed them reverently, as one kisses the hands of a saint.

When he lifted his head again to take her in his arms, something glistened on the hand of Ma'moiselle, but it was not a diamond.

THE AFFAIR AT ISLINGTON.

By Matthew White, Jr.,

Author of "One of the Profession," "Allan Kane's Friend," etc.

I.

IT was a rainy night, and the house was a poor one. But the members of the company extracted some little satisfaction from reminding one another that they had told manager Roberts how it would be, when he announced that Beverley would be taken in as a one night stand.

"I never saw a good show town yet," declared the first old gentleman, "that wasn't located on a navigable river."

He was talking with Marie Myrwin, the leading woman, just before the curtain went up on the second act. She scarcely heard him. She was feeling utterly miserable. The train had been late, and there was barely time for the company to swallow their dinners and get to the theater. As she did not appear in the first act, she had had it a little easier than the others; but then she had lost her trunk key, the dressing room was a vile place, and now, by the time she was ready to go on, she had a violent headache.

"I shall soon lose my good looks at this rate," she said to herself with a sigh, as, standing in front of the cracked mirror, she gave a final touch of the hare's foot to her make up. "Then half my capital will be gone."

But she had not lost them yet in any degree. Attired in the white evening dress of the ball room scene, the tiara of diamonds in her hair, she was a vision of loveliness as the curtain went up, revealing her to the few citizens of Beverley who had braved the storm to come out and see a play which—with another company—had made a record of a hundred nights in the metropolis.

At the first opportunity Marie swept her eyes disdainfully over the rows of empty seats. How humiliating it was! And what a disappointment the whole life had been to her!

It seemed as if she had never realized this as she realized it tonight; and she had

been in the profession for five years, ever since she was seventeen. The loneliness of it was its most oppressive feature. That excess of fraternal camaraderie, where everybody called everybody else by his or her first name, put out of the question, to her mind at least, any real sincerity of attachment.

She was thinking of this as she toyed with her fan and smiled during her by play with the first old gentleman, while the leading man and the soubrette were holding the center of the stage.

"Why didn't you brace up on a pony, Marie?" Harmon took the opportunity to whisper under cover of a laugh raised by Sophie Waters.

Marie gave a little shiver. Was it possible that she could allow herself to be spoken to in this way day after day and never resent it? But pshaw! How silly she was tonight. What could be the cause of it?

There was no time to speculate on this now, however. Her cue was coming in an instant. She rose and walked toward the footlights, and for a second before she turned for her scene with Harry Vane, she scanned the first two rows of orchestra stalls, curious to see what sort of people this slow little town of Beverley turned out.

"Gilbert Dean!"

She did not even form the words with her lips, but the shock of the recognition was so great that it seemed to her as if she must have shouted the name. She recognized him instantly, in spite of the mustache he had grown since she last saw him, five years before. What a silly quarrel it was that parted them! How different her life might have been were it not for that! She had loved Gilbert Dean as she had never loved any one before or since, and now, as she saw him before her in the full glory of attained manhood, she realized that she loved him still.

"I must have felt his presence in the place," she said to herself, "even though I