

THE NEW GOVERNESS.

BY F. HODGSON, AUTHOR OF "KATHLEEN'S LOVE-STORY," ETC., ETC.

"The new governess, my lady," said the footman.

"Show her in, James, and then have the breakfast things removed," answered Lady Grace Havelstock.

A handsome gentleman, of five-and-thirty, who had just risen from the table, and was leaning against the mantel-piece, moved as if to leave the room; but Lady Grace stopped him with a wave of her eye-glass.

"Don't go, Malcolm," she said, "at least not yet. I want your opinion of the new governess. From what I hear, I'm afraid she's too young and inexperienced."

"Just as you please," answered the gentleman, indifferently, retiring to the mantel-piece. At the same moment, the footman came back, saying, pompously,

"The new governess, my lady."

Lady Grace gave a start, and almost an exclamation. The new governess was dressed in mourning, and was not more than nineteen or twenty years old; she was, in fact, much more like a governess out of a novel, than the hard-worked, middle-aged governess of real life. Sir Malcolm Lindsfarn, as he lounged in the background, looking at her lazily, yet critically, confessed to himself that she was a vision of the rarest beauty. Such deep, violet eyes, such golden hair, such a perfect complexion, such a sweet, refined face, and such a graceful, flexible figure he had never seen united in one person; and few men, in his time, had seen so many lovely women.

Let us say a word about Sir Malcolm before we go further. He was not in a very good humor this morning. He had come down to his widowed sister's, Lady Grace Havelstock's, the night before, for the purpose of enjoying the September shooting, and had woken up to find a drizzling rain, that looked as if it would last for a week. This was grievance the first. Grievance the second was that his sister had attacked him, at once, on the old subject of his getting married. She had found, she said, just the young lady who was suited to him, and who was coming to visit her, fortunately, in a day or two. Now Sir Malcolm was a confirmed bachelor. He had a habit of saying, "the worst use you can put a man to, next to hanging, is marrying him."

His sister's attempt at match-making, therefore, had somewhat ruffled his temper.

"When shall I be old enough to be left in peace?" he had said. "If five-and-thirty years don't entitle a man to be freed from this sort of persecution, what amount of gray hairs will? I am ten years older in feeling than I ought to be, simply because Miss Armor, and Miss Screw, and Miss Glydden, and their friends, have been hunting me down, for years and years, as if I was a fox, or a hare, or some other noxious game."

"But, Malcolm," Lady Grace had begun, "I can assure you that Miss——"

"There, that is enough, Grace," he had said, rising from the table, crossly. "Thanks, of course, all the same! But I don't wish even to hear your guest's name. If there wasn't so many of your affairs to look after, I wouldn't stay. Oh! yes—don't interrupt, pray—— I know she sings divinely, and all that sort of thing; speaks every language under the sun, Japanese and Sanscrit included; but you'll pardon me for begging to be excused acting the old farce over again."

It was at this juncture that the footman had come in to announce the arrival of the new governess, cutting short the colloquy between the brother and sister.

Lady Grace waited a moment or two, partly that the footman might fill his tray and leave, partly to give the new governess, who seemed embarrassed, a chance to recover herself. Lady Grace's three children, gathering at her knee, eyed the stranger with curiosity and expectancy on their faces.

"I hardly thought, my dear," said Lady Grace, at last opening the conversation, "to find quite so young a person in my new governess. Let me see," she added, twirling her eye-glass, "you name is——"

The new governess had stood all this time with folded hands, modestly looking on the carpet. She now raised her eyes, and Sir Malcolm thought he had never seen such wonderful eyes before, and looked at Lady Grace. After a moment, she replied, in the sweetest of voices, with that low modulation so lovely in a woman.

"Miss Murdock. Jean Murdock."

"Ah! yes, I remember. Your father was a

Scotch clergyman. Your recommendations are so good," continued Lady Grace, smiling encouragingly, "that I will take you, in spite of your youth. I hope we shall like each other, my dear, and that you'll like the children. You are willing to make yourself generally useful, I suppose? Have no objection to plain sewing? Will dine with the children when necessary? Thanks! I think that will do for the present. Gracie here will show you to your room, and begin to make your acquaintance, and I'll join you presently."

Now all this was only what every mother, engaging a governess, says, or at least something very like it. Most mothers, indeed, enter more into details; but then Lady Grace was really a lady, and avoided details just now, especially about salary, for she remembered that a gentleman was present. As for that gentleman, he was rather shocked, for he had never seen a governess engaged before, and the transaction struck him as rather heartless, if not worse. But whether he would have felt all this if the new governess had been ugly, we will not profess to say. Or whether he would have thought of it at all, even in the case of this governess, if he had not been slightly out of humor with his sister, we cannot positively affirm.

"That's cool, anyhow," he said, as soon as they were alone. "Is this the way you talk to all governesses?"

"Why, what's the matter?" and his sister turned round, so as to face him. "I wasn't rude—was I?"

"I don't know what you call rude," replied Sir Malcolm; "but when I saw you sitting there so coolly, twirling your eye-glass, and measuring that poor girl from head to foot, while she stood like a—like a—well, like a slave in the market at Stamboul," blurring out the nearest simile he could think of. "I didn't wonder that the world was full of communists and socialists, and all sorts of red-republicans. Gad, I'd be a red myself, and cut the throats of the rich, too, if they were as supercilious as you were."

"I'm very glad you're not a red republican then," replied his sister, laughing, "for I shouldn't like to have my throat cut. But, surely, Malcolm, I wasn't supercilious? Now, be honest, and tell the truth. I wasn't, was I?"

"'Pon honor, Grace, I can't say. I suppose it's the way you all talk, in such cases: perhaps we men, in our line, are just as bad. But it struck me as very like buying a hunter. I suppose I'm cross this morning: so you won't mind what I say. At any rate, your Miss Murdock didn't seem to be hurt: she's used to it, I suppose, poor thing!"

"I'm afraid she's too young," answered his sister. "That's why I asked you to stay. I was told she was only twenty, but she looks a year younger."

"Every bit of it," said Sir Malcolm.

"However, she seems so gentle, and is so well recommended, and the children took to her, as you saw, at once——"

"Come, now, sister mine, that won't do," interrupted Sir Malcolm, with a hearty laugh, his good-humor all returning. "It was yourself, quite as much as the children, that took to her. But I think you've made a mistake. The girl is too young to be able to exercise authority over the kids. You've a soft heart, Grace, and you couldn't resist that modest air, and those appealing eyes. So, after asking me to stay, proposing to seek my advice, you suddenly take the matter into your own hands, and engage her at once. If you were a man, you'd have fallen in love with her. Fortunately, men are of tougher fibre, or I don't know what would become of us."

"There you go again," said Lady Grace, "with your covert sneers: you are intolerable, Malcolm, and that's the whole of it. However, I will admit that, after having asked you to stay, I ought to have taken your advice. You've been so kind to me since dear Herbert's death—I don't know what I should have done without you, in all these long, dreary years."

Sir Malcolm, who had a heart as soft as his sister's, only he would not own to it, came up to Lady Grace's chair, stooped over it, and kissed her, saying, "I would be a beast, Grace, if I didn't do everything I could for you. There are only we two left." With these words, as if suddenly conscious he had been "making a fool of himself," as he often phrased it, when he thus gave way to the honest sentiments of his nature, he turned abruptly, and left the room.

The weather cleared somewhat after awhile, and Sir Malcolm took his gun and went out. But the sport was indifferent, and he soon returned. Going into the breakfast-room, on his way up stairs, he saw, to his surprise, the new governess sitting there, sewing on a child's white apron. He had come in, it must be admitted, to dry himself at the fire that was always kept there, and he was not a little annoyed. "Deuce take it," he said to himself, "I can't do it while she's here. Why don't she stick to the nursery?" Then he added aloud, "Good-morning. It is Miss Murdock, I believe."

"Yes! it is Miss Murdock," said the new governess, looking up demurely, and rising as if to leave the room.

Now Sir Malcolm was a gentleman, not merely

a conventional one, but a gentleman by nature, Woman-hater, as he called himself, he still had that chivalrous feeling toward every one of the opposite sex, which is, after all, the surest test of the real knightly character.

"Pray," he said, therefore, "don't let me disturb you. Nay, I beg of you."

"But," answered the new governess, laying her work into a little basket, which stood on the table, "it is time for me to go to the children. You do not disturb me," and with a faint smile, and no little embarrassment, she went out of the room.

Sir Malcolm followed, renewing his protestations; but it either was time for her to go, or she was too shy to remain where he was, and so persisted in retiring. This, strange to say, made him cross again, and he went up to his room, wet as he was, and though he knew there was no fire there.

That day, at dinner, the new governess did not make her appearance. At first, Sir Malcolm had not thought of it; but when the meal was half over, he remembered her, and asked his sister where she was.

"She dined, to-day, with the children," replied Lady Grace. "I want her to get acquainted with them. Besides, she has a good deal to do—unpacking, you know, and getting settled in her room—and she asked to be excused. To-morrow, perhaps, she'll come down. I want to treat her as kindly as possible, after what you said of my superciliousness."

"Ah! Yes, to be sure," said Sir Malcolm, and made no other remark. But, perhaps, if he had analyzed his feelings, he would have owned to a little surprise, if not some slight degree of disappointment, that any woman, much less a governess, should be indifferent as to meeting him at dinner.

The next day, after breakfast, Sir Malcolm went out again with his gun, though it was raining worse than ever. In the school-room, up stairs, the new governess heard the solitary crack of his gun, now distant, now nearer, all the morning. When he returned, an hour after noon, the lessons had been laid aside, and through the open door of the nursery, Sir Malcolm caught sight of the children at dinner; but the new governess was not with them; and going on to his room, he found a bright fire burning there, an easy chair wheeled before it, and the new governess standing on the hearth, quietly warming his slippers.

She blushed, at first, to find herself caught unawares, but immediately rallied.

"Lady Grace said you would be wet," she remarked, as if her presence there was the most

natural thing in the world, "and so ordered a fire to be made, especially as I had told her that you wouldn't stay down stairs yesterday, when you found me in the sitting-room. She asked me, or rather directed me," added the new governess, emphasizing the word, with another slight blush, and the least trace of embarrassment, "to come in and see that your slippers were warmed, as she was herself busy writing letters. But why did you go out?" she suddenly asked, in quite a matter-of-fact manner. "You must have known you would get wet."

"There was nothing to be gained by staying at home," he replied.

"You had better put on your slippers at once, Sir Malcolm," she answered. "I see your feet are quite wet."

He would have liked, very much, to have detained her a few minutes; but she put that out of the question by leaving him immediately.

"You must let me thank you," he barely found time to say, as she departed.

"You are very welcome," she answered; "but at the same time, I consider such things as part of the duties I have to perform."

There is nothing in the world which so intensely pleases a man as the little attentions which none but a woman can pay him. Ravelstoke was unusually alive to such attentions. From his boyhood, his life had been a solitary one, spent in lonely roamings over the world, and now, at five-and-thirty years of age, he often felt a need which he never acknowledged to himself. Long after the new governess had quitted the room, he sat before the fire musing, and luxuriating in the comfort she had left behind her. Gradually there came up to him the thought that it would be very pleasant, very pleasant indeed, to have some one to care for him in this manner every day.

"Jean Murdock," he found himself saying. "Just such a name as suits her thoroughly. The very sound to go with that sweet face and those serene eyes."

When the dinner-bell sounded, he suddenly awakened to a new annoyance, in the recollection of Lady Grace's visitor. What if she had come, and he was doomed to undergo the ancient martyrdom once again?

"Now, if it had been this little Jean, in her black dress, a fellow could stand it," he grumbled, as he went down stairs; "but, great heavens! a second Miss Armor?"

"Any visitors, Betters?" he said to a manservant, who was passing through the hall.

"None, Sir Malcolm," was the reply. "Her ladyship dines alone."

"Thank fortune, there's no Miss Armor, at least," he muttered, as he entered the dining-room.

"I thought your divinity was to arrive to-day, Grace," he remarked, at dessert.

"I have just received the news that circumstances will detain her in town a few days," said Lady Havelstock, smiling faintly, as she picked over her purple grapes, with the handsomest of plump white fingers. "Don't look so ridiculously happy, Malcolm. We may expect her in a day or so."

Probably Sir Malcolm had looked happy, for certainly he had felt relieved.

"Then the trunks, the ten trunks I saw, this morning, in the hall, are a premature arrival," he said, with a little malicious triumph in the idea of the young lady's annoyance at their absence, "or has she ten more in reserve?"

"Probably," laughed Lady Havelstock. "At all events they remain here until she comes."

"And at all events," said Sir Malcolm, going up stairs after dinner, "I shall have the opportunity of cultivating this clear-voiced little governess without being interfered with. I wonder why she didn't come down to-day, either?"

Now do not imagine, my readers, that Sir Malcolm had fallen in love, at first sight, with the new governess, for really he had done no such thing. He merely felt the same, self-willed, curious interest he would have felt in any other novelty. At the same time, I do not pretend to say that such an interest was not a dangerous one, at least, for a middle-aged, unmarried man to feel in a young and beautiful girl; but at present he was merely amused and pleased with her. He looked at the nursery-door, as he passed it, but it was closed, and he could only hear an occasional word from the children. He did not even catch a glimpse of the black dress through the remainder of the day, and for the two days following. He wondered at this. "Why don't she come down to dinner?" he said. "Can she be annoyed at having been discovered in my room?" So, on the evening of the third day, finding himself near the school-room, he walked in, discovered Jean Murdock sitting at the window, sewing again.

She did not look much surprised at seeing him. It was evident that, in her practical fashion, she had discovered at once that he was a privileged person, and accordingly accepted his peculiarities as a matter of fact.

"I suppose you do not object to visitors," he said, taking in at a rapid glance her unmoved face, the plain dress, and an innocent white ruffle at the whiter throat.

"I suppose not," she answered, "or, at least, Lady Havelstock——"

"Lady Havelstock has nothing to do with it," he interrupted, not very politely. "I asked if you objected."

"Ah! I? Certainly not. Would it matter much if I did?"

"To me it would," he answered, brusquely. "May I sit down, Miss Murdock?"

"There is a chair," she said, in much the same tone she would have used to one of her young pupils.

He drew it to the window, and took a seat in it, with a vague idea that this commonplace little governess had an odd sort of power over him, through her very calmness of manner. Any other governess would have blushed, he said inwardly; ten to one looked embarrassed, and made a little simpleton of herself; but this young person merely submitted to his presence, as she submitted to the presence of Lady Havelstock's cherubs, and allowed him to seat himself as if instead of Sir Malcolm Lindisfarn, he was only plain Mr. Smith. How smooth her shining hair was, he said to himself, and what a wonderful quantity of it must be twisted in that soft-looking golden coil, at the back of her shapely head! Governess, or not, there was a thorough-bred air about her, which no one could fail to see at the first glance. And then how beautiful she was!

"Do you never lay that everlasting sewing aside?" he asked, at last.

"Sometimes," she answered. "But just now I happen to be rather more busy than usual."

It might have been meant as a quiet hint, but Sir Malcolm ignored it with singular obtuseness. A certain very masculine self-will was one of the chief traits in his character, and just now he had no inclination to abandon his intention of studying his sister's governess.

Unceremonious and eccentric as he occasionally was, he was a man with great power of fascination, when he chose to exercise it. He had never chosen to exercise it upon Lady Grace's divinities, and now, wonderful to relate, for almost the first time in his life, he considered "the game worth the candle." Before half an hour had passed, he had the pleasure of seeing the quiet, reticent eyes brighten in an odd, swift surprise. The capable face proved itself even more capable than he imagined it could be. When the new governess grew eager, a bright glow of color warmed her smooth tea-rose skin, like a touch of sun-light; and when she laughed, which was rarely, she laughed much as a brown linnæus sings, with the freshest thrill of music he had ever heard.

By a little skillful questioning, he led her to speak of herself, though, to tell the truth, she was rather reserved in her answers. "I am an orphan, as you know, and think occupation may give me back my interest in life," she said. "So you see me here a governess. I have no near relations to protect me," she said, when she had ended her commonplace little story, "so I had to protect myself." And as she said it, her quiet endurance gave Sir Malcolm a novel sense of pain. Such is the inconsistency of mankind, that her calmness irritated him, and for the first time in the course of their brief acquaintance, he would rather have seen her less self-reliant.

"Is it very easy?" he asked, with a touch of bitterness in his tone.

"Easy to protect oneself?" sighing a little. "I hardly know as yet. As long as one can earn one's bread and butter, you know, it can't be very difficult; but, unfortunately, people grow old. I wonder," she added, with a naive little anxiety in her voice, "whether I shall have saved enough to live upon by the time I am fifty years old. I once heard of a governess who did."

"Great heavens!" he broke out. "Is that what you look forward to?"

She glanced up in surprise.

"Why not? One might buy a little house, you know, and live in it by oneself, like the fairy godmother in story-books."

"Don't talk so, for pity's sake," he said, with passion enough in his voice for a man of twenty. "You don't know what you are saying. There should be years of love and happiness before a girl like you, and you are wrong in not hoping for them."

He forgot himself, in his momentary excitement, and spoke as he had often felt. Glancing at the bent face, curiously enough, he saw that the creamy cheek was fairly flooded with color. For a few minutes Jean Murdock did not even utter a word.

"A girl of nineteen has no right to be desolate," he said, in his brusque fashion. "Let me be your friend. I'm old enough, I hope." This last with a slight bitterness.

"How old are you?" she asked, that odd touch of satire in her tone. She had recovered herself by this time.

"Thirty-five," he answered, savagely, ashamed of himself for feeling so reluctant to tell her the truth. "Not very young, is it?"

"Not very old, either. Yet one ought to have outgrown the follies of youth, by that time."

He scrutinized her keenly. She could express a great deal in that soft voice of hers. For a moment he felt rather dubious as to her exact

meaning; but, as usual, there was nothing to be learned from her unmoved face.

But he was not to be baffled, and when he rose to go away, he returned to his question.

"You have not answered me," he said. "I asked you if we could not be friends?"

She looked up at him, with a sort of half surprise.

"I am only Lady Havelstock's governess," she said, a trifle reprovingly. "And you are Sir Malcolm Lindisfarn."

He was almost angered.

"Need that interfere with our friendship?" he questioned, a little savagely.

"It puts it out of the question," she answered decidedly. "Don't think me ungrateful, if you please. I don't mean to be; but don't you see that Lady Havelstock might not like it?"

He paused for a moment, ready to be quite angry; but glancing down at the quiet face, he noticed the faintest suspicion of an appeal upon it, and taking a practical view of the case, he saw that perhaps he had made a slight mistake.

She was quick-sighted enough to discover, at once, that he had not misunderstood her, and, seeing it, held out her hand to him with a pretty, frank gesture. "We shall not be enemies, I am sure," she said, the appeal which had been in her eyes touching her voice. "I really feel your kindness very much, Sir Malcolm; but please do not forget that I—— Well, that I am only Jean Murdock."

Sir Malcolm went down stairs, with a more thoughtful face than he had worn for many a day. "Only Jean Murdock" had touched him even more than he was willing to confess. She had been quite right after all. Pleasant and harmless as this hour in the nursery had been, Lady Havelstock was, like many other women, not very merciful in her censures upon any slight appearance of imprudence. An odd fate, it seemed, which had given Lady Grace's divinities their thousands, and made this thoroughbred little creature "only Jean Murdock." He was thinking of this, quite seriously, on his way to the parlor; but as he crossed the hall, the train of his thought was broken, for a side-door opened, and Lady Havelstock came out, and met him half way.

"Where have you been, Malcolm?" she said. "I have been looking for you everywhere. Miss Laureston has come, and is in the drawing-room."

Blanche Laureston was a handsome woman, of five-and-twenty, and quite showy enough to justify the presence of the ten trunks; but Sir Malcolm's glance at her, as she bowed to him

under the great drawing-room chandelier, satisfied him fully that his sister had made a greater mistake than ever in the choice of a wife for him. Nor did a further acquaintance modify this unfavorable opinion. Miss Laureston was a mere woman of fashion, devoted to dress and company, without a single original idea, but with a good deal of that sly malice which belongs to so many of this class, especially if they are a little faded, as she was beginning to be.

In one respect, Miss Laureston's coming made a change. Jean Murdock now appeared, daily, at the dinner-table. We must confess, that, while this pleased Sir Malcolm, on the whole, it brought with it a feeling something like mortified pride. "She has staid away on my account," he said. "Her headaches were all sham. I wish the proprieties were at the deuce, and Lady Grace also, if she has anything to do with it," he added, crossly.

It was useless for Miss Laureston to don her freshest toilets for the purpose of bewildering Sir Malcolm. He was not easily bewildered, and showed his indifference in a manner which, to say the least, was highly impolite.

On one occasion, when, after the fashion of dangerous young ladies, she had asked his advice as to the color of some dainty article of dress, he had actually turned to Jean Murdock, who chanced to be in the room, and, after glancing at her attire, had deliberately advised black as the most becoming shade which could be worn.

We said Jean Murdock happened to be in the room. During the hours which she did not spend with her pupils, she was now generally in the parlors. She sat next to Miss Laureston at dinner, demurely meeting that young lady's well-bred superciliousness, with a humility which was highly creditable. She replied to Miss Laureston's slight impertinences with due propriety; she listened to Miss Laureston's performances in the evening in respectful silence; and altogether with so unmoved and serene an air that Sir Malcolm was at a loss to understand what it might mean. Her replies were always sufficiently pointed, as far as he was concerned, and her greatest charm to him had been her ungoverness-like little dashes of spirit and straightforwardness. Was it possible she was afraid of Miss Laureston?

The bare idea of the thing was too much for his not all-enduring patience, and, accordingly, one evening, when the fair visitor had been rather more pointed than usual in her delicately expressed patronage, he lost control over himself, and spoke his mind.

"Why don't you give that girl a lesson?"

he demanded, unceremoniously, finding himself alone with Jean for a few minutes.

"What girl?" she asked, innocently, looking up from her book, for he had left his place, and was standing near her.

"The amiable Laureston," he answered, with a faint sneer. "She needs one."

"Perhaps so," was the quiet comment; "but would it be acceptable from Lady Havelstock's governess?"

"It would be well merited," he returned. "You are not afraid of her, are you? Promise me you will give her one, some day."

Almost unconsciously he laid his hand upon her shoulder.

"As I don't happen to stand in any very great awe of the young lady, possibly I may—some day. Excuse me, Sir Malcolm, but—" and she glanced down at his hand, with a touch of not very well pleased color.

He withdrew it instantly.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "Forgive me, Jean."

"I shall not forgive you if you call me Jean," she said, concisely. "Lady Havelstock's governess—"

"What has Lady Havelstock to do with it?" he broke out, impatiently. "If I love you—"

What more he might have said is a thing unknown, for Jean Murdock rose, closing her book with the most placid of faces.

"If I were Miss Laureston, Sir Malcolm," she said, "you might possibly be privileged to talk nonsense to me, but, under existing circumstances, I think I had better go back to the school-room."

Before he had time to say anything more, she was gone.

"Heavens! have I offended her?" said Sir Malcolm. "What shall I do?"

Sir Malcolm, you see, had fallen in love at last. What women of high rank had been unable to accomplish, a self-reliant, modest little governess had brought about. Perhaps, because he had been so long invulnerable, he was now all the more in earnest.

He hoped for awhile she would come back. He paced the drawing-room like a caged lion, but she did not make her appearance. Finally, he went to bed, out of humor with himself and everything else.

"Is not your governess rather a presuming young person?" asked Miss Laureston, of Lady Grace, in the course of the following morning.

"Presuming?" echoed her ladyship, no slight surprise showing itself in her tone. "I hope not. Why do you ask?"

Miss Laureston bent a little lower over her embroidery, with a suspicion of color on her cheek.

"Merely from curiosity. Pray don't consider me officious, Lady Havelstock, but really, once or twice I have fancied that——"

"You have fancied?" put in Lady Grace, a thought coldly, filling up the young lady's pause.

"That her manner toward Sir Malcolm was somewhat familiar. I may be wrong, but it has appeared so to me."

"I think it must be fancy," was Lady Havelstock's quiet remark. "I have never observed it."

But, quietly as she had met the matter, it is possible that her ladyship thought it worth while to remove temptation from her brother's path, at least as far as was possible. So the black dress was again absent from its place at the dinner-table. Blanche Laureston was prepared for this, for, trifling with her luncheon, she had heard her hostess say to one of the servants,

"You will tell the housekeeper that Miss Murdock, after this, dines with the children, Betters."

Sir Malcolm heard it also. He glanced at his sister quickly, and reading nothing in her apparently unconscious face, relapsed into non-communicativeness.

In the meantime, in the school-room, Jean Murdock applied herself diligently to arithmetic and French grammar. Day after day passed, yet she still continued invisible. Sir Malcolm grew savage. He watched to waylay her, but never succeeded. The school-room door, too, strange to say, was always locked.

A week passed—Sir Malcolm angrily taciturn, Lady Havelstock serenely unconscious, Miss Laureston as innocently triumphant as it is possible for a well-bred young lady to be.

One morning, a servant brought a note into the nursery for Jean Murdock, which Sir Malcolm had left before going out, ordering it to be delivered at once. There were only a few lines in it, but they were very characteristic. It ran thus:

"JEAN—I will bear this no longer. You shall not seclude yourself from me. I will know the worst. I love only one woman under the face of heaven, and to-night that woman must decide my fate. When I asked you to call me your friend, you confronted me with Lady Havelstock; but Lady Havelstock has nothing to do with the question, to which a woman can only answer either yes, or no.
LINDSEARN."

This brief but expressive missive, Jean Murdock read once, twice, even three times, and then

laying it aside, turned to the French grammar again; but it would have been a difficult matter to decide from her serene face what the answer was to be.

It was not very late when Sir Malcolm returned home. Perhaps he was as anxious to hear his fate decided as a younger man would have been. At any rate he was earlier than usual. But, alas! for his ardor: the new governess had baffled him again. She was seated in the drawing-room, sewing quietly, as usual, and apparently quite undisturbed by the presence of Lady Grace and Miss Laureston. She did not even blush, when he entered. She merely looked up, with a self-possessed little nod, which, if one is to believe the poets, was not very promising. What did it mean? There was only one thing to be done, to wait patiently until an opportunity offered itself, and then be determined. His strong self-will stood Sir Malcolm in good stead that night, though he was tried sorely. But at last Miss Laureston left the room, and then he rose coolly, and went over to Miss Murdock.

"Must I speak before Lady Havelstock?" he asked. "I am determined to speak, Jean."

"I think Lady Havelstock may hear anything you have to say," was the brief reply.

He turned to Lady Grace at once.

"Grace," he said, with a steady determination, which was not unbecoming. "I love your governess honestly, and earnestly, and I am determined to tell her so. If she would have given me the opportunity, I would have told her so before; but since she would not, I tell her in your presence. When a man of my age loves a woman honestly, he has only two things to say to her. The first is, 'I love you;' the second, 'Will you be my wife?' Having said both of which things to your governess, I await her answer."

By the time he had finished speaking, Jean Murdock was standing before him, a bright glow in her violet eyes, a vivid color on her cheeks.

"Lady Havelstock," she said. "Tell this gentleman how he has been deceived."

"Tell him yourself, Jean," said Lady Grace, with an affectionate smile. "He will like it better."

"Perhaps he will," said the new governess, a demure smile touching her lips. "Sir Malcolm, you have spoken very honorably and generously; but you have made a mistake. You have said that you love Lady Havelstock's governess, and Lady Havelstock's governess is not—— Well, not Jean Murdock."

Sir Malcolm turned, mystified, to his sister.

"Grace," he asked, "what does this mean?"
 "What Jean has told you," she answered.
 "There is a mistake——"
 "And 'Jean Murdock'——" he began.
 "Is 'Jean Murdock' still," said that person;
 "but not Lady Havelstock's governess."
 "The young lady you were so much afraid of,
 Malcolm," said Lady Grace, a little maliciously.
 "And your probation has been your punishment.
 It was a little plot, not of Jean's, but of mine;
 and if anybody is to blame, it is I. The morn-
 ing she arrived, I expected, not Jean, but a new
 governess. The servants knew it, and when Jean
 appeared, in a fly from the station, having come
 two days sooner than she had intended, they
 took her, in her simple black dress, for the new
 governess, and announced her, as you remember,
 for such. For an instant, when she entered, I
 was struck dumb, and came near betraying my-
 self. Then, all at once, there flashed across me
 the possibility of the little plot I have carried out.
 I knew that you would be prejudiced against
 Jean in her proper person, and never give your-
 self a chance to see her good qualities. Oh! you
 needn't shake your head: I know you better
 than you know yourself. I knew also that Jean
 was afraid of being married for her money, for
 she has a fortune, sir, that might be an induc-
 ement even to a rich young baronet. So I re-
 ceived her as the veritable governess, and, per-
 haps, in playing my part, a little overdid it, as
 you took care to tell me at the time. Jean could
 not imagine what I meant; but she saw I meant
 something; and she obeyed my lead. She is

quick enough," with a smile at Jean, "as, per-
 haps, you have found out by this time. When I
 joined her up-stairs, and unfolded my plot to
 her, I had great difficulty in winning her con-
 sent to it; nor do I think I would have succeeded,
 if she had not committed herself already in the
 breakfast-room, to the character of the new gover-
 ness. The Scottish clergyman was a suggestion
 of my own, because the real governess is the
 daughter of one. I had to telegraph to her, that
 very day, not to come for awhile yet; but I sup-
 pose I may send for her at once now; though I
 doubt if the children will ever like her as well
 as they liked Jean Murdock. Now I will leave
 you to yourselves."

When the door had closed on Lady Grace,
 Jean turned to her companion, her eyes and
 cheeks all aglow.

"I did not intend it, you see, at first; I could
 not have begun it deliberately; but what woman
 would not have been tempted to try her power,
 when the mistake as to her position had been
 already made? And then——"

"Don't tell me anything more just yet," he
 said. "At five-and-thirty years of age a man
 cannot afford to lose one moment's happiness,
 even for a *denouement*. I asked you a question,
 Jean, and, rich or poor, governess or not, I want
 an answer, for it is to the woman, and not to her
 surroundings that I speak—is it to be 'yes,' or
 'no?'"

"It is to be 'yes,'" she said softly, and laid
 her hand in his.

He took her in his arms, and kissed her.

IN THE WOODS.

BY G. J. WILSON.

By the sweet woodland stream,
 Alone, as through the leafy shade I wander,
 'Neath the o'er-hanging green,
 Long while, the pure enrapturing scene I ponder.
 The valley, deep and broad,
 Where quiet reigns, and peace, from morn to evon;
 Surely the house of God
 Is the wide forest, and the gate of heaven!
 Wild fern, and foliage fair,
 Grace the rude margin of the rippling waters;
 In vesture, rich and rare,
 Smile, near and far, the brawling brooklets' daughters.
 Against the eastern sky,
 Gigantic birches loom, like ancient columns;
 And maples, towering high,
 Whereon the tempests of an age have fallen.
 Through the angust array—
 Through the proud forest, gleams the sun of morning;

Green leaf and moistening spray,
 Glow in the radiance, all the vale adorning.
 Far from life's busy stage,
 How sweet, upon the downy orake reposing!
 And nature's wondrous page,
 Fresh beauties ever to the sight disclosing.
 Sweet-solitude! secure
 And undisturbed, by sin or ill's invasion!
 How like a fairy dream!
 How like the glories of the new creation!
 Oh, Lord! to us restore
 The field and wood, with friends we love and cherish!
 When time shall be no more,
 Let not the earth, with all that's lovely, perish!
 Let the secluded place,
 The desert, and the wilderness, again
 Declare thy plenteous grace!
 For thine the power and glory be—Amen!