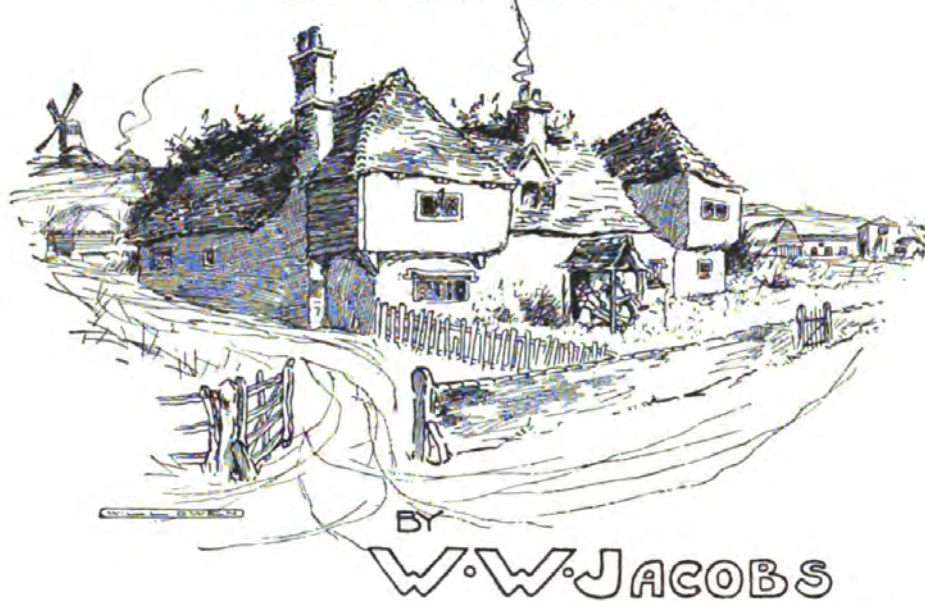


HIS LORDSHIP



BY

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FARMER ROSE sat in his porch smoking an evening pipe. By his side, in a comfortable Windsor chair, sat his friend the miller, also smoking, and gazing with half-closed eyes at the landscape as he listened for the thousandth time to his host's complaints about his daughter.

"The long and the short of it is, Cray," said the farmer, with an air of mournful pride, "she's far too good-looking."

Mr. Cray grunted.

"Truth is truth, though she's my daughter," continued Mr. Rose, vaguely. "She's too good-looking. Sometimes when I've taken her up to market I've seen the folks fair turn their backs on the cattle and stare at her instead."

Mr. Cray sniffed; louder, perhaps, than he had intended. "Beautiful that rose-bush smells," he remarked, as his friend turned and eyed him.

"What is the consequence?" demanded the farmer, relaxing his gaze. "She looks in the glass and sees herself, and then she gets miserable and uppish because there ain't nobody in these parts good enough for her to marry."

"It's a extraordinary thing to me where she gets them good looks from," said the miller, deliberately.

"Ah!" said Mr. Rose, and sat trying to think of a means of enlightening his friend without undue loss of modesty.

"She ain't a bit like her poor mother," mused Mr. Cray.

"No, she don't get her looks from her," assented the other.

"It's one o' them things you can't account for," said Mr. Cray, who was very tired of the subject; "it's just like seeing a beautiful flower blooming on an old cabbage-stump."

The farmer knocked his pipe out noisily and began to refill it. "People have said that she takes after me a trifle," he remarked, shortly.

"You weren't fool enough to believe that, I know," said the miller. "Why, she's no more like you than you're like a warming-pan—not so much."

Mr. Rose regarded his friend fixedly. "You ain't got a very nice way o' putting things, Cray," he said, mournfully.

"I'm no flatterer," said the miller; "never was. And you can't please everybody. If I said your daughter took after you I don't s'pose she'd ever speak to me again."

"The worst of it is," said the farmer, disregarding this remark, "she won't settle down. There's young Walter Lomas after her now, and she won't look at him. He's a decent young fellow is Walter, and she's been and

named one o' the pigs after him, and the way she mixes them up together is disgraceful."

"If she was my girl she should marry young Walter," said the miller, firmly. "What's wrong with him?"

"She looks higher," replied the other, mysteriously; "she's always reading them romantic books full o' love tales, and she's never tired o' talking of a girl her mother used to know that went on the stage and married a baronet. She goes and sits in the best parlour every afternoon now, and calls it the drawing-room. She'll sit there till she's past the marrying age, and then she'll turn round and blame me."

"She wants a lesson," said Mr. Cray, firmly. "She wants to be taught her position in life, not to go about turning up her nose at young men and naming pigs after them."

Mr. Rose sighed.

"What she wants to understand is that the upper classes wouldn't look at her," pursued the miller.

"It would be easier to make her understand that if they didn't," said the farmer.

Mr. Rose withdrew his pipe and regarded him open-mouthed.

"Yes; but how——" he began.

"And it seems to me," interrupted Mr. Cray, "that I know just the young fellow to do it—nephew of my wife's. He was coming to stay a fortnight with us, but you can have him with pleasure—me and him don't get on over and above well."

"Perhaps he wouldn't do it," objected the farmer.

"He'd do it like a shot," said Mr. Cray, positively. "It would be fun for us and it 'ud be a lesson for her. If you like, I'll tell him to write to you for lodgings, as he wants to come for a fortnight's fresh air after the fatiguing gaieties of town."

"Fatiguing gaieties of town," repeated the admiring farmer. "Fatiguing——"

He sat back in his chair and laughed, and Mr. Cray, delighted at the prospect of getting rid so easily of a tiresome guest, laughed too. Overhead at the open window a third person laughed, but in so quiet and well-bred a fashion that neither of them heard her.

The farmer received a letter a day or two



"NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN JANE ROSE ON THE ONE SIDE AND LORD FAIRMOUNT ON THE OTHER WERE SOON IN PROGRESS."

"I mean," said Mr. Cray, sternly, "with a view to marriage. What you ought to do is to get somebody staying down here with you pretending to be a lord or a nobleman, and ordering her about and not noticing her good looks at all. Then, while she's upset about that, in comes Walter Lomas to comfort her and be a contrast to the other."

afterwards, and negotiations between Jane Rose on the one side and Lord Fairmount on the other were soon in progress; the farmer's own composition being deemed somewhat crude for such a correspondence.

"I wish he didn't want it kept so secret," said Miss Rose, pondering over the final letter. "I should like to let the Crays and

one or two more people know he is staying with us. However, I suppose he must have his own way."

"You must do as he wishes," said her father, using his handkerchief violently.

Jane sighed. "He'll be a little company for me, at any rate," she remarked. "What is the matter, father?"

"Bit of a cold," said the farmer, indistinctly, as he made for the door, still holding his handkerchief to his face. "Been coming on some time."

He put on his hat and went out, and Miss Rose, watching him from the window, was not

Then he walked slowly into the kitchen. Miss Rose called out something after him.

"Eh?" said her father, coming back hopefully.

"How is your cold, dear?"

The farmer made no reply, and his daughter smiled contentedly as she heard him stamping about in the larder. He made but a poor meal, and then, refusing point-blank to assist Annie in moving the piano, went and smoked a very reflective pipe in the garden.

Lord Fairmount arrived the following day on foot from the station, and after acknow-



"SHE'S GOT YOUR EYES," SAID HIS LORDSHIP.

without fears that the joke might prove too much for a man of his habit. She regarded him thoughtfully, and when he returned at one o'clock to dinner, and encountered instead a violent dust-storm which was raging in the house, she noted with pleasure that his sense of humour was more under control.

"Dinner?" she said, as he strove to squeeze past the furniture which was piled in the hall. "We've got no time to think of dinner, and if we had there's no place for you to eat it. You'd better go in the larder and cut yourself a crust of bread and cheese."

Her father hesitated and glared at the servant, who, with her head bound up in a duster, passed at the double with a broom.

ledging the farmer's salute with a distant nod requested him to send a cart for his luggage. He was a tall, good-looking young man, and as he stood in the hall languidly twisting his moustache Miss Rose deliberately decided upon his destruction.

"These your daughters?" he inquired, carelessly, as he followed his host into the parlour.

"One of 'em is, my lord; the other is my servant," replied the farmer.

"She's got your eyes," said his lordship, tapping the astonished Annie under the chin; "your nose too, I think."

"That's my servant," said the farmer, knitting his brows at him.

"Oh, indeed," said his lordship, airily.

He turned round and regarded Jane, but, although she tried to meet him half-way by elevating her chin a little, his audacity failed him and the words died away on his tongue. A long silence followed, broken only by the ill-suppressed giggles of Annie, who had retired to the kitchen.

"I trust that we shall make your lordship comfortable," said Miss Rose.

"I hope so, my good girl," was the reply. "And now will you show me my room?"

Miss Rose led the way upstairs and threw open the door; Lord Fairmount, pausing on the threshold, gazed at it disparagingly.

"Is this the best room you have?" he inquired, stiffly.

"Oh, no," said Miss Rose, smiling; "father's room is much better than this. Look here."

She threw open another door and, ignoring a gesticulating figure which stood in the hall below, regarded him anxiously. "If you would prefer father's room he would be delighted for you to have it. Delighted."

"Yes, I will have this one," said Lord Fairmount, entering. "Bring me up some hot water, please, and clear these boots and leggings out."

Miss Rose tripped downstairs and, bestowing a witching smile upon her sire, waved away his request for an explanation and hastened into the kitchen, whence Annie shortly afterwards emerged with the water.

It was with something of a shock that the farmer discovered that he had to wait for his dinner while his lordship had luncheon. That meal, under his daughter's management, took a long time, and the joint when it reached him was more than half cold. It was, moreover, quite clear that the aristocracy had not even mastered the rudiments of carving, but preferred instead to box the compass for tit-bits.

He ate his meal in silence, and when it was over sought out his guest to administer a few much-needed stage-directions. Owing, however, to the ubiquity of Jane he wasted nearly the whole of the afternoon before he obtained an opportunity. Even then the interview was short, the farmer having to compress into ten seconds instructions for Lord Fairmount to express a desire to take his meals with the family, and his dinner at the respectable hour of 1 p.m. Instructions as to a change of bedroom were frustrated by the re-appearance of Jane.

His lordship went for a walk after that, and coming back with a bored air stood on the hearthrug in the living-room and watched Miss Rose sewing.

"Very dull place," he said at last, in a dissatisfied voice.

"Yes, my lord," said Miss Rose, demurely.

"Fearfully dull," complained his lordship, stifling a yawn. "What I'm to do to amuse myself for a fortnight I'm sure I don't know."

Miss Rose raised her fine eyes and regarded him intently. Many a lesser man would have looked no farther for amusement.

"I'm afraid there is not much to do about here, my lord," she said, quietly. "We are very plain folk in these parts."

"Yes," assented the other. An obvious compliment rose of itself to his lips, but he restrained himself, though with difficulty. Miss Rose bent her head over her work and stitched industriously. His lordship took up a book and, remembering his mission, read for a couple of hours without taking the slightest notice of her. Miss Rose glanced over in his direction once or twice, and then, with a somewhat vixenish expression on her delicate features, resumed her sewing.

"Wonderful eyes she's got," said the gentleman, as he sat on the edge of his bed that night and thought over the events of the day. "It's pretty to see them flash."

He saw them flash several times during the next few days, and Mr. Rose himself was more than satisfied with the hauteur with which his guest treated the household.

"But I don't like the way you have with me," he complained.

"It's all in the part," urged his lordship.

"Well, you can leave that part out," rejoined Mr. Rose, with some acerbity. "I object to being spoke to as you speak to me before that girl Annie. Be as proud and unpleasant as you like to my daughter, but leave me alone. Mind that!"

His lordship promised, and in pursuance of his host's instructions strove manfully to subdue feelings towards Miss Rose by no means in accordance with them. The best of us are liable to absent-mindedness, and he sometimes so far forgot himself as to address her in tones as humble as any in her somewhat large experience.

"I hope that we are making you comfortable here, my lord?" she said, as they sat together one afternoon.

"I have never been more comfortable in my life," was the gracious reply.

Miss Rose shook her head. "Oh, my lord," she said, in protest, "think of your mansion."

His lordship thought of it. For two or three days he had been thinking of houses

and furniture and other things of that nature.

"I have never seen an old country seat," continued Miss Rose, clasping her hands and gazing at him wistfully. "I should be so grateful if your lordship would describe yours to me."

His lordship shifted uneasily, and then, in face of the girl's persistence, stood for some time divided between the contending claims of Hampton Court Palace and the Tower of London. He finally decided upon the former, after first refurnishing it at Maple's.

"How happy you must be!" said the breathless Jane, when he had finished.

gazed at him with eyes suffused with timid admiration.

"Oh, my lord," she said, prettily, "now I know what you've been doing. You've been slumming."

"Slumming?" gasped his lordship.

"You couldn't have described a place like that unless you had been," said Miss Rose, nodding. "I hope you took the poor people some nice hot soup."

His lordship tried to explain, but without success. Miss Rose persisted in regarding him as a missionary of food and warmth, and spoke feelingly of the people who had to live in such places. She also warned him against the risk of infection.

"You don't understand" he repeated,



"HIS LORDSHIP TRIED TO EXPLAIN."

He shook his head gravely. "My possessions have never given me any happiness," he remarked. "I would much rather be in a humble rank of life. Live where I like, and—and marry whom I like."

There was no mistaking the meaning fall in his voice. Miss Rose sighed gently and lowered her eyes—her lashes had often excited comment. Then, in a soft voice, she asked him the sort of life he would prefer.

In reply, his lordship, with an eloquence which surprised himself, portrayed the joys of life in a seven-roomed house in town, with a greenhouse six feet by three, and a garden large enough to contain it. He really spoke well, and when he had finished his listener

impatiently. "These are nice houses—nice enough for anybody to live in. If you took soup to people like that, why, they'd throw it at you."

"Wretches!" murmured the indignant Jane, who was enjoying herself amazingly.

His lordship eyed her with sudden suspicion, but her face was quite grave and bore traces of strong feeling. He explained again, but without avail.

"You never ought to go near such places, my lord," she concluded, solemnly, as she rose to quit the room. "Even a girl of my station would draw the line at that."

She bowed deeply and withdrew. His lordship sank into a chair and, thrusting his

hands into his pockets, gazed gloomily at the dried grasses in the grate.

During the next day or two his appetite failed, and other well-known symptoms set in. Miss Rose, diagnosing them all, prescribed by stealth some bitter remedies. The farmer regarded his change of manner with disapproval, and, concluding that it was due to his own complaints, sought to reassure him. He also pointed out that his daughter's opinion of the aristocracy was hardly likely to increase if the only member she knew went about the house as though he had just lost his grandmother.

"You are longing for the gaities of town, my lord," he remarked one morning at breakfast.

His lordship shook his head. The gaities comprised, amongst other things, a stool and a desk.

"I don't like town," he said, with a glance at Jane. "If I had my choice I would live here always. I would sooner live here in this charming spot with this charming society than anywhere."

Mr. Rose coughed and, having caught his eye, shook his head at him and significantly glanced over at the unconscious Jane. The young man ignored his action and, having got an opening, gave utterance in the course of the next ten minutes to radical heresies of so violent a type that the farmer could hardly keep his seat. Social distinctions were condemned utterly, and the House of Lords referred to as a human dust-bin. The farmer gazed open-mouthed at this snake he had nourished.

"Your lordship will alter your mind when you get to town," said Jane, demurely.

"Never!" declared the other, impressively.

The girl sighed, and gazing first with much interest at her parent, who seemed to be doing his best to ward off a fit, turned her lustrous eyes upon the guest.

"We shall all miss you," she said, softly.

"You've been a lesson to all of us."

"Lesson?" he repeated, flushing.

"It has improved our behaviour so, having a lord in the house," said Miss Rose, with painful humility. "I'm sure father hasn't been like the same man since you've been here."

"What d'ye mean?" demanded the farmer, hotly.

"Don't speak like that before his lordship, father," said his daughter, hastily. "I'm not blaming you; you're no worse than the other men about here. You haven't had an opportunity of learning before, that's all. It isn't your fault."

"Learning?" bellowed the farmer, turning an inflamed visage upon his apprehensive guest. "Have you noticed anything about my behaviour?"

"Certainly not," said his lordship, hastily.

"All I know is," continued Miss Rose, positively, "I wish you were going to stay here another six months for father's sake."

"Look here——" began Mr. Rose, smiting the table.

"And Annie's," said Jane, raising her voice above the din. "I don't know which has improved the most. I'm sure the way they both drink their tea now——"

Mr. Rose pushed his chair back loudly and got up from the table. For a moment he stood struggling for words, then he turned suddenly with a growl and quitted the room, banging the door after him in a fashion which clearly indicated that he still had some lessons to learn.

"You've made your father angry," said his lordship.

"It's for his own good," said Miss Rose.

"Are you really sorry to leave us?"

"Sorry?" repeated the other. "Sorry is no word for it."

"You will miss father," said the girl.

He sighed gently.

"And Annie," she continued.

He sighed again, and Jane took a slight glance at him cornerwise.

"And me too, I hope," she said, in a low voice.

"Miss you!" repeated his lordship, in a suffocating voice. "I should miss the sun less."

"I am so glad," said Jane, clasping her hands; "it is so nice to feel that one is not quite forgotten. Of course, I can never forget you. You are the only nobleman I have ever met."

"I hope that it is not only because of that," he said, forlornly.

Miss Rose pondered. When she pondered her eyes increased in size and revealed unsuspected depths.

"No-o," she said at length, in a hesitating voice.

"Suppose that I were not what I am represented to be," he said, slowly. "Suppose that, instead of being Lord Fairmount, I were merely a clerk."

"A clerk?" repeated Miss Rose, with a very well-managed shudder. "How can I suppose such an absurd thing as that?"

"But if I were?" urged his lordship, feverishly.

"It's no use supposing such a thing as

that," said Miss Rose, briskly; "your high birth is stamped on you."

His lordship shook his head.

"I would sooner be a labourer on this farm than a king anywhere else," he said, with feeling.

Miss Rose drew a pattern on the floor with the toe of her shoe.

"The poorest labourer on the farm can have the pleasure of looking at you every day," continued his lordship, passionately. "Every day of his life he can see you, and feel a better man for it."

Miss Rose looked at him sharply. Only the day before the poorest labourer had seen her—when he wasn't expecting the honour—and received an epitome of his character which had nearly stunned him. But his lordship's face was quite grave.

"I go to-morrow," he said.

"Yes," said Jane, in a hushed voice.

He crossed the room gently and took a seat by her side. Miss Rose, still gazing at the floor, wondered indignantly why it was she was not blushing. His lordship's conversation had come to a sudden stop and the silence was most awkward.

"I've been a fool, Miss Rose," he said at last, rising and standing over her; "and I've

been taking a great liberty. I've been deceiving you for nearly a fortnight."

"Nonsense!" responded Miss Rose, briskly.

"I have been deceiving you," he repeated. "I have made you believe that I am a person of title."

"Nonsense!" said Miss Rose again.

The other started and eyed her uneasily.

"Nobody would mistake you for a lord," said Miss Rose, cruelly. "Why, I shouldn't think that you had ever seen one. You didn't do it at all properly. Why, your uncle Cray would have done it better."

Mr. Cray's nephew fell back in consternation and eyed her dumbly as she laughed. All mirth is not contagious, and he was easily able to refrain from joining in this.

"I can't understand," said Miss Rose, as she wiped a tear-dimmed eye—"I can't understand how you could have thought I should be so stupid."

"I've been a fool," said the other, bitterly, as he retreated to the door. "Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Jane. She looked him full in the face, and the blushes for which she had been waiting came in force. "You needn't go, unless you want to," she said, softly. "I like fools better than lords."

