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OUGHT WE TO VISIT HER?

BY



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CHAPTER I.

A Question of Finance.

A SITTING-ROOM in one of the best hotels in Spa; the hour, four in the afternoon; husband and wife alone together.

"Forty and eighty are certainly one hundred and twenty," says Mr. Theobald, resting his forehead on his hand, and applying himself resolutely to the sheet of paper covered with figures that lies before him. "From this subtract fifty; add ten; divide by six. Jenny, my dear," after a minute or more of intense mental difficulty, "I don't know where the balance can be, but on paper, and according to all the four rules of arithmetic, we are exactly fifty pounds better off than I thought."

"Then you have forgotten to put down something," answers Jane. "The only kind of arithmetic I believe in is counting one's cash. How much money have you got in your pocket?"

Jane's husband takes out a penknife, a book of cigarette-paper, and four napoleons. He is an exceedingly near-sighted man, and has to put up his

eyeglass in order to survey his property as he spreads it, in a neat row, upon the table. "Ridiculous to think"—the eyeglass falls with a clink against his watch-chain—"ridiculous to think, in the face of all these rows of figures, that we are reduced to four napoleons, Jane!"

"I remember the days when I thought four napoleons riches. Why, only last Christmas I made a winter-dress for myself, and a whole suit for Blossy, with less than four napoleons. Oh, Theobald," looking suddenly up from her work, a diaphanous little blue cloud that shall presently be a bonnet, "what a queer sensation it is to think we are rich people at last! that it doesn't matter *really* whether we happen to have four napoleons or forty in our pockets!"

"I don't think any sensation on the subject of money ought to be queer to us," says Mr. Theobald; "and as to feeling rich—why, I never felt in my life before that I was a pauper till now. As long as we lived—well, on nothing particular, Jenny; the dregs of capital, ill-luck of friends, and other eccentricities of fortune—poverty was too undefined to weigh upon me. To-morrow was a scoundrel with whom we had no personal acquaintance, To-day a jovial good fellow with whom we were glad to share our bottle of champagne while it lasted. Now——"

"Now your cousin is dead, bless him! and we shall live in a home of our own in our own dear country," interrupts Jane, with visible pride.

"I hope we shall like our own dear country when

we get there," remarks Mr. Theobald. "Our home, too. We have done very well without a home hitherto; I mean we have carried it about the continent very conveniently—a meerscham-pipe, a work-box, and Blossy's doll! How could we be more at home than we are at this minute here, and how, my dear Jenny, how, in the name of fortune, do you suppose we are going to keep up a place like Theobalds on our pittance of an income?"

"Pittance! You call six hundred a-year (and we shall have every farthing of that, the lawyer's letter says so)—you call six hundred a-year a pittance!"

"Six hundred a-year is enough for any man when it is *not* an income," replies Mr. Theobald. "Given, no capital, no position, the habits of vagrants, and the principles of—well, well, Jenny, let bygones be bygones. But, given certain conditions, and six hundred a-year, got no one knows how, and spent after the same fashion in the course of a year, is sufficient for any man, particularly if he has a wife who can make her bonnets and dresses, and sufficient sense in his own head to keep clear of England."

"The dream of my life is England," says Jane, with a certain wistfulness of tone. "Not London—I know London too well to dream about that—but the country, a jolly homelike old country-place such as Theobalds must be——"

"And with the society of English people, all better off than ourselves, both as regards this world and the next, for excitement? Ah, I hope the reality will come