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MRS. GERALD'S NIECE BY LADY G. FULLERTON

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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BY

LADY GEORGIANA FULLERTON.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

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MRS. GERALD'S NIECE.

PART II.

(CONTINUED.)

CHAPTER V.

ON their way home, the Derwents met the Abate Giovanni—Pré Gian, as he was called in the Mentonese dialect. He was an old acquaintance of Ita's, and was delighted to see her. She introduced him to Edgar.

"So she had been married for more than two years! Well, how time did fly—she did not look much older for all that! Did she not find Mentone much altered? Ah! people were building away very fast. There was a new hotel springing up, and five or six villas just finished. What would they come to at last? How pleased Antonia must have been to see her Signorina. And Madalena, he was sure, would walk from Nice, one of these days, to pay her a visit. The villa had been let to English people the last two winters, but Antonia was always complaining of the *padrona's* absence. Ah! they had been to the Capo, and yesterday to the Annunziata. Brava! Monsieur did not look very strong; but the climate, with the help of God, would soon make him quite well. He was so tall, and

tall people are not generally as strong as short ones, like himself—but, perhaps, that was not the case in England, where, he supposed, everybody was tall—but he would not keep them standing in the cold. He should call upon them some day soon,” and, with a kind smile, the Abbé left them.

“What a venerable, amiable-looking man,” Edgar said, and Ita was pleased.

On the following day Mr. Neville came to dinner, and a good deal of interesting conversation, without any approach to controversy, took place between him and Edgar. He spoke of the *festas* in the neighbouring villages which would take place after Christmas, and Ita, whose delight it had been to go to them in former years, was glad to hear her husband say that they should certainly try to spend St. Agnes's day at the little old town of that name. And when they were sitting alone together the next evening, she communicated to him a plan which had just entered her head. She wished to institute at Holmwood a festival in honour of the patron saint of their church, St. James the Apostle, and had been thinking over all the details of it. There was a sort of tacit compromise unconsciously going on between her and Edgar at that time. When she saw him vexed at some manifestation of her strong Roman Catholic predilections, she used to propitiate him by proposing to transplant some of her favourite customs or observances into the Church of England in general, and Holmwood church in particular. He was always relieved by her enthusiasm taking that form, and in consequence received these suggestions more graciously than he might have otherwise done.

On this occasion he said, "But do not you remember, darling, that we have kept St. James's day as a festival these last two years. We had red and white roses on the altar. Annie gave us leave to gather as many as we could find. They were very much gone off, but we spoiled her garden of all that remained, and the school-children had a feast."

"Oh yes; but what I want is to get the people about us, rich and poor, to take an interest in the festival, and come to church as they do here from a distance, and make the day in every way a pleasant one. I think it is so nice when religion is connected with enjoyment, and poor people have so few pleasures."

Edgar smiled and said, "But how would your propose to make our staid country-people merry on the occasion?"

"We might have a fair on the green after the service."

"That would not amuse them much, I think."

"I should like to try, and then the school children might act a little play in a tent, as they did in the hall at Christmas. May I have St. James's day this year to do what I like with?"

"That is a bold request," Edgar said, laughing. "If you do not interfere with the hours of Church Service, and allow Roland and me to have a veto on your proceedings, you and Eliza may do your best or your worst out of doors. And, indeed, I think you had better try the experiment at Bramblemoor than at Holmwood. I am not sure Annie would like it."

"She likes anything you like."