

**APPLETONS' NEW HANDY-
VOLUME SERIES. AN
ACCOMPLISHED
GENTLEMAN**

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Appletons' New Handy-Volume Series. An Accomplished Gentleman by Julian Sturgis

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ACCOMPLISHED
GENTLEMAN.

BY

JULIAN STURGIS,

AUTHOR OF "JOHN-A-DREAMA."

"With all good grace to grace a gentleman."

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AN ACCOMPLISHED GENTLEMAN

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

"Now, by the salt wave of the Mediterranean, a sweet touch, a quick renew of wit! snip, snap, quick and home."

"EVEN there," said the Contessa Belrotoli, "there are human hearts." She was speaking of Paris, whence she had but just returned with spring to her Venetian palace. "That is so true," murmured her hostess Lady Lappin, with her soft, contemplative air. These two ladies were firm friends, and it was owing to the devotion of his wife to the Italian lady that Sir Rupert Lappin had become tenant of the first floor of the capacious Palazzo Belrotoli. Lady Lappin had declared again and again that she could not live out of Venice, and so far was her husband from desiring her death, that he had hastened to secure a permanent residence in that wonderful city.

He found it very dull, but he was wont to proclaim its historical interest with amazing persistence and amiability. "There's nothing like it, you know," he would say; "and when one thinks of all that has happened, you know." Beyond this he did not often venture, but would cough a little and smile, and feel encouraged by the vague grandeur of his ideas. As a practical man he was sure that, if he must live in Venice, it was well to be tenant of the finest rooms in the famous Palazzo Belrotoli, and he was glad to enjoy the friendship of the family. It is true that he paid a price which, whispered out of doors, set markets, bridges, and gondola-stations gesticulating with amazement; but then the Signor Conte, who had sometimes found it hard to pay both his own and his wife's debts, had written him a letter adorned with the longest and softest superlatives. This representative of an ancient Venetian family never came to Venice, and, had it been in his power, would have sold to the rich Englishman his palace, with all his titles of nobility thrown in—nay, the entire city and the kingdom of united Italy to boot. But though he went so far as to offer the whole mansion for a royal sum, the Countess his wife, who protested that she adored her Venetians, and who was not indifferent to the pleasure of thwarting her husband, commanded Sir Rupert to decline. Thus it happened that the Contessa Belrotoli returned to Venice with the

spring, and on a pleasant afternoon swept down from the second to the first floor of her palace, guest of her sympathetic English friend, and eager to enjoy one of those delightful tea-parties which seemed to celebrate the union of English comfort with Italian art.

Seated in Lady Lappin's most sumptuous chair, and with her little feet thrust forward and displayed upon a gold-embroidered cushion, the Belrotoli was in high good humor. There were people about her—people who might wonder and admire: that faithful Florentine, the Captain Tiribomba, erect in his very tight uniform; Mr. Bonamy Playdell, who was sure to tell stories about her; the venerable Andrew Fernlyn, who appeared so refreshingly guileless; Stephen Aylward, who was certainly young; and the great Mr. Hugo Deane himself. There were also some women present, but these were less interesting to the Contessa. And yet she delighted in the society of Lady Lappin. She never appeared more elegant nor less common than when she was sharply contrasted with her English friend, who was neither tall nor slender, and whose nose was deficient in expression. Moreover, she found it pleasant to quench her thirst at an inexhaustible fountain of sympathy. And Lady Lappin on her side was charmed by the Belrotoli—not, as she told herself and others, by her rank, but by something unconventional, daring, Bohemian in this

dazzling Venetian. She received her words with profound attention; and, when she heard that remark about human hearts in Paris, she found a world of meaning in it, and said, "That is so true," with a marked emphasis on the "so."

Meanwhile Sir Rupert was hovering moth-like about his brilliant guest. "We have been quite desolate," he said—"quite desolate all the winter, I assure you"; and he added a little cough and a little bow as he handed her a cup of fragrant tea.

"I am come back to the home of gallantry," replied the lady, with her fascinating accent, her quick glance, and slight wriggle of the shoulders.

"You have been very gay in Paris," continued Sir Rupert, nervous but jocular. "We have heard of you. We have seen it in the papers—the 'Figaro' and that, you know—driving in the Bois and breaking hearts." Here he paused, laughed, coughed, and drew his hand aimlessly across his lips, while his kindly brown eyes looked doubtfully and apologetically into hers.

"Ah, wicked one!" said she, smiling, and sighed deeply. "And they say I have been gay. Gay!" she sighed again. "May I have a little more sugar? A thousand thanks. I have the sweet tooth, as you say"; and she gave a little laugh full of coquetry.

"And the best cook, they say," continued the

Baronet, wagging his head, "and the best turnout, and the best—the best people."

"One must have the best," murmured the Contessa, as if it were a moral truism. "Ah, but it is good to be once more at this quiet life! To be rid of it *all!*" she added, with a motion of washing her hands, as she thought of a young Parisian who had followed her about during the winter, and of whom she was heartily tired. Here Lady Lappin gave her husband the look which always meant that he was likely to be tedious, and the little man dropped away from the spot where he had been standing and smiling before the Contessa's chair. He was very grateful for these hints, and thought it a wonderful thing to have a wife who understood these delicate matters. He retired into the background and admired her social talents. He watched her as she moved among them with an air of high-bred familiarity suitable to a lady who had renounced society for art. It is true that she had never been in that society which is called the best; but, having long thought of herself as of one who had renounced the pomps and pleasures of the British aristocracy, she had learned to believe in her renunciation and to speak of it with amazing frankness. Now she lived for art. She wore her hair down her back and bound by a simple ribbon; her gown of violet velvet had a girdle of graven gold. Whatever the fashion of the mo-

ment, the classical was always right. The Countess, who got all her gowns from the most exclusive of Parisian artists, protested that she envied her friend. "But how is it possible?" she cried. "Look at me. I am a scarecrow. To dare to be simple, one must have curves." Lady Lappin had curves. As she moved among her few intimate friends, who had come to tea with her that afternoon, it was felt that she needed height and a face less cherubically round. So thought Miss Lindley, looking at her hostess with somewhat watery eyes, and remembering her own grace in those days when she was called the Lily of Loamshire. The Lily who had refused a park was a spinster lily still, and not unacquainted with toil. She produced triumphs of intricate embroidery and designs for artistic needlework, painted fans and flower-pieces, and sold these various products privately to friends. She meekly valued herself on this determined privacy; perhaps it was a judicious delicacy which prevented her from exposing her wares in the rude marts of the world. Her delicate nose was apt to get red now; her cheeks were pinched; her motive for living in Venice was economical; and she had a general air of being insufficiently nourished, which made the spectator grateful for the profusion of Lady Lappin's home-made muffins. She was as devoted to Lady Lappin as was Lady Lappin to the Belrotoli. "It's my belief," Sir Rupert had