

**A LAGGARD IN
LOVE. IN THREE
VOLUMES. VOL. II**

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A Laggard in Love. In Three Volumes. Vol. II by Annie Thomas

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ANNIE THOMAS

**A LAGGARD IN
LOVE. IN THREE
VOLUMES. VOL. II**

A LAGGARD IN LOVE

By ANNIE THOMAS,

(MRS. PENDER CUDLIP)

AUTHOR OF "DENIS DONNE," "PLAYED OUT," "CALLED TO ACCOUNT,"
"THE DOWER HOUSE," ETC., ETC.

"Lilies for a bridal bed,
Roses for a matron's head,
Violets for a maiden dead!
Pansies let my flowers be!
On the living grave I bear
Scatter them without a tear:
Let no friend, however dear,
Waste one hope, one fear for me."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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1877.

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A LAGGARD IN LOVE.



CHAPTER I.

THE RUMBLING OF THE EARTHQUAKE.

THE ponies are full of corn and play, and they occupy Annie's attention pretty well from the moment they pull away with a rush from the house in South Moulton Street, till they fall in with the stream of carriages that is setting in for the afternoon drive under the Marble Arch. During this rapid progress the two ladies, who are companions of their own free will, and at the same time rather against their respective judgments and inclinations, have only exchanged monosyllabic

remarks. But Alice has had time to reflect that by her acquiescence in the plan for the disposition of the remainder of the day proposed to her by Lady Galton, she has virtually gone into subjection to that lady, and committed herself to a style of intimacy that will rob her of her independence.

On the other hand, Lady Galton has had time to repent herself of her impulse to be demonstratively friendly, or rather of her having yielded to that impulse. "There was no need for me to have done as much as I would do for any girl to whom Albert got engaged, and I have stupidly done more," she tells herself in a chafed and repentant spirit, as a vision of the chastened joys she will be called upon to behold this evening when the lovers meet, rises before her. "It's like be-mothering Rowley and helping him to do his wooing, to have taken the burden of this girl upon myself in this pro-

nounced way ; just now when I'm distrait, too, on account of mamma's folly."

As if in answer to her thought Alice breaks the silence at this juncture.

"A stranger dropping into one's usual routine makes that routine go very draggingly, doesn't it?"

"Not if the stranger really drops into it," Annie says, with an effort at easy cordiality, feeling the remark to be a rebuke.

"Which the stranger never can do properly and without a hitch," Alice goes on. "This driving in the park comes in to your daily round, and you take it as you do your breakfast and dinner, and think no more about it ; but it's all new to me, and——"

"The novelty isn't intensely amusing," Lady Galton interrupts, "that is just what I feared ; an endless succession of faces you don't know is an infinitely wearisome sight."

"No, it isn't infinitely wearisome any

more than it's intensely annoying," Alice says. "That's just the mistake I have often made when I've taken the responsibility of a stray stranger upon myself for a few hours; it's so natural to fear that the outsider must be finding it flat, if she doesn't portray enthusiastic pleasure and surprise at everything."

"I think if you did that here I should upset you," Annie laughs, and she cannot help wondering where Alice, who has lived all her life in a middle-class country clique, got her graceful composure from, as the girl answers—

"Oh no, you wouldn't. An upset would be melodramatic, and there's a touch of absurdity in every melodramatic action when it's looked back upon in cold blood. I can far easier fancy you're doing anything wrong than anything ridiculous; not that I think for an instant you'd do anything wrong, but I'm *sure* you would never do anything ridiculous."

"Perhaps I should think wrong what you might only consider ridiculous," Annie begins sententiously, but Alice stops her at once, refusing to be put down by anything resembling married woman's airs.

"Not at all; my code of right and wrong is a very severe one. I've been obliged to make it so, for I have been left to rule myself in a great measure, and I have had to play the part of adviser to brothers who have had no other guide but me."

"Perhaps you would have thought it wrong to marry as I did," Annie says bluntly, colouring a little, as she speaks under the consciousness she has of that action of her life not being altogether above suspicion.

"I don't know how you married."

"Hasn't Rowley told you? Well, the man I married was a dear, good, kind, trusting, generous gentleman."