

# WM. DE MORGAN'S LATEST ROMANCE

"Somehow Good" Another Book  
in the Delightful "Joseph  
Vance" and "Alice-for-  
Short" Vein.



R. WILLIAM DE MORGAN'S third published story, issued by Henry Holt & Co. to-day, will fortify him in the affection of the friends he has

won by the other two. Not that the story matters very seriously, though the plot of it might well in other hands have served to furnish forth all the thrills that melodrama is made of. "Somehow Good" the author calls the book, quaintly but not fantastically—as you shall see in due course—and proceeds to illustrate (marveling the while openly at the illustration) how the wholesomest, breeziest, cleanest, brightest, delightfulest sort of modern young woman—girl, rather—can come into the world under the ugly sign of the bar sinister.

Rosalind is the young woman's name—but she is known as Sally—who remarks of the mother of a worshipper, "general practitioner" by occupation—Goody Vereker, being a lady that "folds her hands over her circumference": "Prosy's parent broods over one and gloats as if one was crumpets." You may infer Sally from that phrase.

Mr. De Morgan is no palterer with words or with morals and decencies. If he deals, in a way, in this very book with evil things, it is that good may come out of them—human kindness, charity, humility, love of husband and wife and child. "We confess," says he, "that we ourselves think there ought to be a statute of limitations and that after a certain lapse of time any offense, however bad, against morality might be held not to have been committed." Wherein he condones the sin not at all, but would spare (at the last) the sinner—under some "working hypothesis of life that would favor peace on earth and good-will toward men; that would establish a *modus vivendi* and enable us to be jolly with these reprobates—at any rate, as soon as they had served their time and picked their oakum. We are not," he adds, "intruding on the province of the theologian—merely discussing the problem of how we can make ourselves pleasant to one another until the final separation of the sheep from the goats, when, however carefully they may have patched up their own little quarrels, they will have to bid each other farewell reluctantly and make up their minds to the permanent endurance of heaven and hell respectively." Thus carefully, lest in Sally's phrase, (applied to quite another matter,) "it all come a buzz like wopses nest" upon somebody's devoted head.

Yet otherwise, may we not be likened unto the bluebottle fly on the window-pane "butting and blundering resonantly against the glass," who learned nothing and forgot nothing—"like the old régime in France"? So our author, phrasing lovingly with words, images, phrases quaintly remembered, as he plays also lovingly with the foibles, virtues, tricks of gesture, speech, mind, and mood of his fellow men and women and the little children that are the earlier editions of both.

Dear familiar friends, companions, playmates of his are these men and women and children—especially the last two classes—and he tells you about them so vividly and tenderly that they must be your friends and familiars, too—for their mere charm and their humanness' sake—in their jests and idle pastimes, not less than in their tragedies and joys.

Sally has a mother, hinted at by the vicar of St. Satisfax ("a harmless and fantastic person," this saint, "who lived in some century or other") as mundane—though an entirely admirable person—and so different from the widow of Nain who "being in Holy Writ was, as it were, Sundane." An unforgettable figure this mother woman of blameless life when we know her and irreproachable Sundays, who may nevertheless have need of the statute of limitations already adverted to.

Then the man, the man who appears in blue serge on the first page and is

presently "electrocuted" under Sally's eye in the Tuppenny Tube in such odd and fractional fashion that he loses his memory—the man in whose strange relation to the pair, mother and daughter, (described in one place and in one phase as "tame cattitude") lies the melodrama, that before now (in Shakespeare, for instance) has made mere literature and the world kin. There is likewise the General Practitioner—called by Sally, Prosy—and Tishy (otherwise Laetitia, daughter of the eminent Professor Sales Wilson, who is something famously encyclopedic) Sally's best girl friend. Tishy has a romance of her own involving the casuistical question how a haberdasher who is not ashamed of being a haberdasher can happen not to be a gentleman. It is this same haberdasher, a young man "universally provided" by Cattley's for emergent use at a party, who has a real "Strad" which he plays like an angel. He comes to adore Laetitia. Also there is Baron Diedrich Kreutzkammer, "a huge cavern for the secretion of gutturals," and Miss Gwendolyn Arkwright, who may be five and burbles. Miss Gwendolyn has her part in the action—not a contemptible one.

And ever so many more; as the Major, who wasn't really a Major because he was a Colonel, and the cabman, called an "energumenon" who had "come down from his box and was 'fiddlin' at something on the 'orse's 'ed.' So Cook says, evidently not impressed with that cab," (number twelve thousand and odd) though it had fetched the electrocuted one to Krakatoa Villa, Glenmoira Road, Shepherd's Bush, W. L.

The man who in "Joseph Vance" of happy memory lifted into literature the inimitable and vernacular Christopher of that ilk, with Christopher's wife and the buttin' sweep and Porky Owls (whose right name was Howells)—these and the rest with their inimitable talk—has in this place with like inspiration, appreciation, humor, and affection lifted into the same medium cabby and Major and Miss Gwendolyn (aged five) and Sally and Prosy and their company. There's no getting the flavor of it except by quotation, as here, or, better, by reading the book, (of near six hundred pages) which it is well to say at once you either like or do not like. If you choose your melodrama neat—thrills "et praeterea exiguum," as Mr. De Morgan himself would say (he doesn't) you'd better leave "Somehow Good" alone. If you are of those that know not Joseph, the son of Christopher (builder, drains promptly attended to) and Alice that was short for Alicia, yet love your Thackeray, you may chance it safely enough—and have your reward. If you know Joseph and Alice you do not need to be told anything more. Except, perhaps, that Mr. De Morgan has not written all these books in the last two years. He had been making desk companions of the three manuscripts long before any of them was printed. It merely happens that the dates of publication followed closely upon each other's heels.