

## MR. PALMLEAF'S PROPOSAL.

White and glistening like a mammoth bridal veil, the December sun lay over all the New Hampshire hills; dark and delicate, like the tracery of lacework, the leafless woods held up their boughs against the dazzling winter sky—and the Rev. Peter Palmleaf, studying over an embryo sermon in his own especial sanctum, glanced up where a blackbird was whistling in the casement, and thought to himself what a lovely world the Lord had made.

When, all of a sudden, a shrill voice called through the entry,

"Peter, the horse is ready."

"What horse?" asked the Rev. Mr. Palmleaf.

"Our horse; to be sure!" said Miss Paulina, his sister.

"What for?" demanded the parson, staring through his near-sighted spectacles at the door.

"To take you to Mr. Darrow's."

"Why am I going to Mr. Darrow's?" further questioned the man of theology.

"Well, I never!" said Miss Paulina, bouncing into the study, with a yellow pocket handkerchief tied around her head and her sleeves rolled in a business-like fashion, up to her elbows. "Peter, you grow more moony and absent-minded every day of your life! Have you forgotten our discussion at the breakfast table? Why, you are going to Mr. Darrow's after a girl, to be sure!"

"A—girl!" repeated the young minister, dreamily, rubbing his forehead. "Oh, I do recall something of the conversation. A hired girl."

"Yes," nodded the lady briskly. "She's going to leave Mr. Darrow's this morning, because the family is so large and work so heavy. She can't find that fault with our establishment, I guess. Ask her how much wages she wants, and how old she is, and ask her if she has any followers—tell her a follower is one thing I can't tolerate, and be sure you bring her back again with her bundles; as I must have her or some person to help me before cousin Philinda's folks come from the city."

"But suppose she won't come!" said the young minister dubiously, fitting on the fingers of his gloves.

"Then you must make her come," said Miss Paulina, hurriedly retreating, to look after a certain kettle, which was noisily boiling over, at the back of the house.

And thus, charged with his mission, the Rev. Peter Palmleaf got into the one-horse cutter, and jingled merrily away.

Mr. Darrow's farmhouse nestled under a hill, in the protecting shadow of a cluster of evergreens, with a green fence in front of it, a red barn at the rear, and a colony of dovehouse at the sunny southern angle, and Mr. Darrow himself, a ruddy-faced elderly man with a fringe of white whiskers around his chin, was shoveling away the pearly masses of snow in front of his door.

"Eh!" said Mr. Darrow, leaning on the handle of his spade, as the bells jingled up in front of his gate, and then stopped. "How? Why, it's the minister! Good morning! That there Sunday sermon of yours was a masterpiece. Me and Squire Sennex—"

"Yes," said Mr. Palmleaf, leisurely alighting and tying the horse to the post. "But I have called on business this morning."

For Mr. Palmleaf was emphatically a man of one idea, for the time being, the "hired girl" had chased all theology out of his head.

"Eh!" said Mr. Darrow; "business?"

"I've come after a young woman," said the minister.

Mr. Darrow dropped the spade in the middle of the snow drift.

"Do you mean Dolly?" he said.

"If that's her name—yes," asserted the minister, solemnly.

"You don't mean that—it is to be an engagement?" cried Mr. Darrow.

"Well, yes—that is, if we suit each other," said Mr. Palmleaf, mildly.

"Jerusalem!" said Mr. Darrow, who had

always heard that Mr. Palmleaf, like most men of genius, was an "eccentric," but had never realized it before. "Have you spoken to her?"

"Certainly not!" answered Mr. Palmleaf. "Of course I shouldn't think of such a thing without seeing you first."

"Very straightforward of you, I'm sure," said the farmer. "But, of course, I can have no objection if Dolly herself is suited. Though," and he smote one red-mitted hand upon his knee, "now I come to think of it, you've never seen Dolly."

"No!" said the minister serenely. "But that need make no difference."

"Jerusalem!" again uttered the farmer. "It wasn't the way I used to look at things when I was a young man."

"Tastes differ," said Mr. Palmleaf, a little impatient at this lengthened discussion.

"Oh, of course you can see her," said Mr. Darrow. "She's in the dairy, skimming milk."

"Dolly!" raising his voice to a wild bellow. "Here's the Rev. Mr. Palmleaf wants to see you! There's the door just to the left, sir."

And, in his near-sighted way, the minister stumbled into Farmer Darrow's dairy, where a rosy-cheeked girl, with jet-black hair, brushed away from a low, olive-dark brow, and eyes like pools of sherry wine, was skimming the cream from multitudinous milk pans into a huge stone pot.

"Young woman," said Mr. Palmleaf, turning his spectacles upon her amazed face, "do you want to engage yourself?"

"Sir?" said Dolly, her spoon coming to an abrupt standstill amid the wrinkly and leather-like folds of the cream on a particular pan.

"In other words," explained Mr. Palmleaf, "do you want a good home?"

"Indeed, sir, I never thought of such a thing!" said Dolly all in a flurry.

"How old are you?" questioned Mr. Palmleaf.

"I am eighteen," said Dolly, in some confusion.

"Have you any followers?"

"Sir?" fluttered Dolly.

"Beaux, I mean," elaborately explained the clergyman.

"Of course I haven't," said Dolly, half inclined to laugh, half to be angry.

"Then I think you'll suit me," said Mr. Palmleaf; or, rather my sister. Our family is not large; the work is light, and Paulina is a most considerate mistress. Get your bundle."

"My—what?" said Dolly in bewilderment.

"Your clothes. I am to take you back with me immediately," said Mr. Palmleaf, "Paulina expects company. It is essential that we obtain help at once."

Dolly Darrow looked up with cheeks crimson like any rose, eyes full of deep brown sparkles, and lips around which danced a perfect galaxy of dimples.

"Wait a minute, please," said she.

"Certainly," said Mr. Palmleaf.

And he sat down on a wooden stool in the corner, and fell to meditating on the "thirdly" of his uncompleted sermon, while Dolly sped up stairs, three steps at a time.

"Father," cried she, flying into the presence of her parents, "the minister has mistaken me for Bridget!"

"Eh?" said Mr. Darrow.

"You don't tell me!" said Mrs. Darrow.

"And he wants to hire me," said Dolly, her eyes gleaming with fun. "And I'm going. Quick—where's my hat, and shawl and mufflers?"

Mrs. Darrow rose up in the majesty of her black silk gown and gold watch-chain.

"Dorothy Darrow," said she, "you're never going to hire as a servant."

"Yes, I am," said Dolly. "It's better than private theatricals. He's so nice and absent-minded, and Paulina is a jewel! Oh, make haste or he'll be tired of waiting!"

And Dolly succeeded in carrying her point. Fifteen minutes later she had got into the cutter, with a parcel, which Mr. Palmleaf stowed snugly away under the seat, and the minister drove home with secret exultation.

Miss Paulina was in the kitchen frying sausages for dinner, when Dorothy walked in, with cheeks like carnations, hair blown all over her face, and the bundle under her arm.

"Here I am, Miss Palmleaf," said she. "The hired help, at your service!"

Miss Paulina stared.

"Why, it's Dorothy," said she. "And I sent Peter after—"

"Yes, I know," said Dolly brightly. "But Bridget was gone, and he mistook me for her, and he has engaged me to work here. And oh, Miss Paulina, please don't deceive him. Because I am a smart little housekeeper, and I can help you just as much as any Irish girl could. Just give me a trial, that's all."

Miss Paulina had a shrewd appreciation of a joke; her hard features relaxed with a smile, as she stood looking down at the radiant little brunette.

"Well," said she; "I don't mind if I do."

For one month, Dorothy Darrow officiated as hired girl at the parsonage. Then she came to the clergyman one day:

"Mr. Palmleaf," said she, "I am going to leave the place!"

Mr. Palmleaf looked in amazement and dismay.

"I hope, Dolly," said he, "that neither my sister nor I have unwittingly offended you!"

"No!" said Dolly, patting her little foot on the staring green leaves in the study carpet, "but, oh, Mr. Palmleaf, I have done wrong, and I earnestly beg your pardon!"

"Dolly!" cried out the Reverend Peter, in mild surprise.

"Because you are so good and true," sobbed the girl. "I am not a hired girl, and I only came here for a joke, and I can't bear to think I'm de-de-deceiving you!"

And Dolly began to cry piteously, behind the corner of her apron.

"You come here for a joke, eh?" said the minister.

"Y-yes!" confessed Dolly, behind her apron.

"Well, then," said the minister, gently drawing her toward him, "suppose you stay in earnest?"

"Sir?" faltered Dolly.

"My dear," said Mr. Palmleaf, "I have got used to you around the house. I should miss you terribly if you should leave us. Do you think I am too old to think of a blooming young wife like you?"

"Not a bit!" cried Dolly indignantly.

"Old—you?"

"Do you like me a little bit?"

"A great deal," said Dolly, laughing and blushing.

"Then you will stay with me always?"

And Dolly promised that she would.

Everybody wondered how so bashful a man as Rev. Mr. Palmleaf ever mustered courage for a proposal; but nobody knew that the "engagement" begun for a joke turned out in sober earnest.

GOOD ADVICE TO READERS.—If you measure the value of study by the insight you get into subjects, not by the power of saying you have read many books, you will soon perceive that no time is so badly saved, as that which is saved in getting through a book in a hurry. For if to the time you have given you had added a little more, the subject would have been fixed on your mind, and the whole time profitably employed; whereas, upon your present arrangement, because you would not give a little more you have lost all. Besides, this is overlooked by rapid and superficial readers—that the best way of reading books with rapidity is to acquire that habit of severe attention to what they contain, that perpetually confines the mind to the single object it has in view. When you have read enough to have acquired the habit of reading without suffering your mind to wander, and when you can bring to bear upon your subject a great share of previous knowledge, you may then read with rapidity; before that, as you have taken the wrong road, the faster you proceed, the more you will be sure to err.—*Sydney Smith.*