A Slight Mistake.

MR. HENRY HIBBARD had dressed in a great hurry; but in spite of his haste he found when he entered the room that the dancing had already begun. He crossed the floor, and after speaking to one or two of the chaperones whom he knew, he stood drawing on his gloves and contemplating the dancers. He could not see very well, and he felt a vague sense of embarrassment at the circumstance. "The lights are poor; my eyes must be tired," he reflected.

After a while he observed that the number of the sexes was equal with himself omitted. That might mean no dancing for him. He scarcely cared for that; propinquity to Miss Willett was all he wanted. He had already discovered her in spite of the mistiness of things; and he followed her with his eye, ready to claim her the moment that the dance ended. The musicians were playing a waltz, but he could not make out which waltz it was. There were five of them on his order, and his dances depended on the lateness of the hour. The music ceased, and the dancers resumed their seats. Mr. Hibbard hastened to Miss Willett.

"Can you tell me which dance that was?"
"The second waltz."
"Thanks; have you a dance left?"

She raised her eyes to his. He thought he saw in them the traces of a mischievous smile. "I am very sorry, but—"

He waited for no more, but bowed and turned away. During the interval he sought dances, but secured only an extra with a girl whom he was inclined to dislike. When the music began again he was in despair, and seated himself beside one of the chaperones. It so happened that the one by whom he sat was Mrs. Wally, and she, as usual, began to chat vivaciously. He kept his ear toward her, but his eye upon Miss Willett.

"Have you heard the news?" inquired Mrs. Wally. But Miss Willett was nearing that part of the room, and his attention was occupied. Mrs. Wally, capable of filling up any number of hiatuses, went on, "No! Why, where have you been then?" Miss Willett was departing, and he was attempting to draw a simile for her going from Aphelion of Venus, with the idea of embodying it in verse, but Mrs. Wally stoutly maintained the attack. "I thought that anything concerning Miss Willett was of such interest to you that you would be sure to know it." Mrs. Wally took a maternal interest in all young men, and had not the slightest objection to subjecting them to cruel surgical operations like this.

"I beg pardon," said Mr. Hibbard, catching at Miss Willet's name, "I did not hear you."
"Ah, you'll listen now," retorted Mrs. Wally.

"It is always pleasant to listen to Mrs. Wally," the young man replied, seeing that he was expected to make amends.

"Of course you know that Miss Willett is engaged." Mrs. Wally smiled slyly at him. He maintained his composure manfully, considering the shock.

"Ah!" he ejaculated.

"Without her father's consent," continued the matron still more archly. He said nothing. "'Tis a horrible scandal," she went on; "her father actually put him out of the house, and forbade her to speak or to write to him. They meet surreptitiously. Perhaps they've been married secretly." This last with a rising inflection, as though a question. Mr. Hibbard did not reply. He never thought even of inquiring the hero's name. His one idea was escape. He nervously adjusted his tie with his neatly gloved hand, and rising excused himself. Mrs. Wally's sly smile continued for some moments after his departure. Mr. Hibbard passed into an adjoining room. As he entered he overheard some words in a low, masculine tone.

"If you really cared for me you wouldn't hesitate to—"