

**MRS. DOBBS'
DULL BOY**

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Mrs. Dobbs' dull boy by Annette Lyster

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ANNETTE LYSTER

**MRS. DOBBS'
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"A picture. Why, bless my heart, Frank, it's your grandfather!"

Frontispiece.

Page 101.

MRS. DOBBS' DULL BOY.

BY

ANNETTE LYSTER,

Author of "North Wind and Sunshine," &c.

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MRS. DOBBS' DULL BOY.

CHAPTER I.

AN EMINENTLY GENTEEL FAMILY.



R. and Mrs. Dobbs had three sons and three daughters: and I may state on the best authority (for surely a mother ought to know her own children) that every individual son and daughter was uncommonly clever, save one.

That one was Jem, the dull boy.

The young Dobbses were more than clever (I still speak on the best authority). They were equally remarkable for personal beauty as for mental endowments; and above all, as Mrs. Dobbs was never weary of adding, they were "eminently genteel." Genteel is a word selected by Mrs. Dobbs, not by me. It is not a favourite of mine. It always implies, to my ear, a certain amount of sham and pretension, but Mrs. Dobbs believed in being genteel, worshipped genteel people, and would

not, I think, have allowed herself to be happy in the Garden of Eden, unless she had been assured that it was a genteel resort.

Time had been when Mr. and Mrs. Dobbs were by no means as genteel as they were when my story opens. They began life in a very small way. Mr. Dobbs was clerk (some unkind people said plainly, shopman) in a great grocery establishment in the rising town of Middlemore, and in those days he was a hard-working, thriving man, and his pretty wife (she was an Irishwoman) seemed very busy and happy among her six children. But a distant relation having left Mr. Dobbs a small sum of money, he determined to risk it in one of those wonderful speculations of which every age has plenty, and being a shrewd man, he prospered beyond his expectation. He continued to speculate, and continued to prosper. The grocery line was given up, and Mr. Dobbs had an office in a good street in Middlemore and a pretty house in the suburbs. It was then that Mrs. Dobbs began to be genteel, and as wealth increased, so did her gentility, and that of her children, or, at least, of most of her children. For if Jem was the dull boy of the family, Dolly was undoubtedly the least genteel girl.

When the two elder girls grew up, Mrs. Dobbs determined that they should make splendid marriages; and to this end she wished to get into good society. So she insisted on moving to a large and handsome house, just outside the town, which she furnished in the most magnificent manner. There were also gardens, greenhouses, hot-houses, croquet ground, and cricket ground, and yet it was within easy

distance of the shops in which the mother and daughters delighted, and of the billiard-rooms and other places of resort affected by the young gentlemen. There was one great blessing connected with Middlemore, Mrs. Dobbs would remark: there were always plenty of soldiers to make the streets look gay, and plenty of officers to dine, play croquet, and dance at Ballydobbs House, as Mrs. Dobbs had named her new abode—thus combining the family name with an Irish sound very pleasingly. She was wont to declare that she belonged to a “very genteel family” in Ireland, and she called one of her sons Fitzgerald De Courcy, so that you might take your choice between these two, and decide whether she had been a Miss Fitzgerald or a Miss De Courcy (or both) at your leisure. Your decision would never have been challenged by Mrs. Dobbs, though in truth her maiden name had been Leary. I beg that no one will imagine me to imply that there is any disgrace in bearing a name less euphonious than De Courcy or Fitzgerald—I am not such a snob. The disgrace lies in being ashamed of it.

The Dobbs family was at tea. Five o'clock tea, need I say; and I am to be understood as speaking generally, and not as implying that every member of the family was present. However, there was a goodly assemblage, and on the whole, the young people justified their mother's pride in them. The eldest girl, Miranda, was singing a wonderfully genteel little song, and considering that she had not learned to play or sing until she was sixteen, she was doing it very well. Up to nearly the same period of her life too, she had answered to the name of Mary Anne; but at