

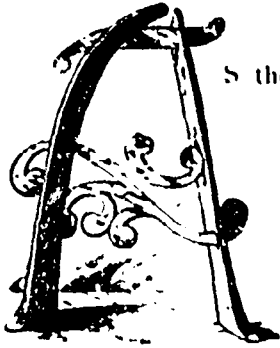
Conclusion
Number

THREE

of Competition
Story.

Two Chapters in Two Lives.

CHAPTER II.



As the train whirled Charlie Fane towards Toronto, visions of Amy rose before him, remembrances of her father's wealth and social position, and her own high-breeding, and he realized of what inestimable advantage these would be to him in carrying out his intention of becoming a leader, not only at the bar, but also in social circles.

"Let no face be kept in mind but the fair of Rosalind," came to him, borne on memory's breath.

Finally he resolved to talk it over with his friend, Montrose. The day after his return he visited the latter at his bachelor chambers on Church street, and told his tale.

When he had finished, Montrose knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and quoted quizzically

"And he
Sighed as he pondered ruefully,
How that, which in Maud was native grace,
In Mrs. Jenkins was out of place.

"For, had he waited, he might have wed
Some maiden, fair and thoroughbred,
For there be maids—"

"Pshaw!" interrupted Charlie, "she's educated, I tell you."

"Well, well, man, do as you please. By the way, when are you going to take me to see Miss Lester?"

"Oh! any time. Next Saturday night do?"

"Yes, all right. Good night."

Charlie went home and to bed, but lay awake for an hour or so, thinking it over. His reflections ran somewhat thus: "I like a pretty girl. Rosalind's certainly prettier than Amy." "I want a girl who'll be able to take her place properly when she's my wife. Come to think of it, Rosalind's a trifle *gauche* in her ways." His concluding thoughts were that he wouldn't let Amy know for a few days that he was in town, and that he'd write a little note to Rosalind, which might mean anything or nothing.

Saturday evening came, and, according to appointment, Montrose called for him, on his way to Miss Lester's.

There was a shade of annoyance on Miss Lester's face as the two young men entered the drawing room. Why Charlie should not have written for more than a week, then come home without word of warning, and brought a friend, who was a perfect stranger to her, with him the first time he came to see her, was somewhat incomprehensible.

Montrose noticed a look of embarrassment on Fane's face, a glitter in Miss Lester's eyes, and a heightened color in her cheeks which could mean nothing else than indignation. The girl quickly recovered herself, however, and chatted away unconcernedly. "Plucky little thing," thought Montrose. "Fane's a fool if he lets her go for the sake of a pretty face he fancies he's in love with."

It was a very piqued and sulky youth who emerged from the Lester home that night, and his wrath vented itself on his friend in expressions which made up in terseness and force for what they lacked in eloquence. The substance of Montrose's reply to all this was, "that if he wanted to keep free of complications he'd better see that one string of his bow was broken, before he fitted another to it."

As Charlie cogitated over his cigar that night

the only way he saw out of the difficulty was for him to write a humble note to Amy, which he accordingly did, pleading sickness as the cause of his not calling before, asking her why she didn't trust him more fully, and giving her by many a term of endearment, to understand that he was "ever, her devoted slave, Charlie F."

"Now for Rosalind. This is pretty rough on a fellow, this is."

"Let no face be kept in mind
But the fair of Rosalind."

flitted again through his mind, and he thereupon gave himself up to sentimental reflections, part of which consisted of regrets that he could not have remained safely engaged to Amy Lester and have carried on the pleasant and romantic flirtation with Rosalind. But he thought it more prudent to gently intimate to the latter, that though it tore his very heart-strings, and made him feel that life was a barren plain, still he must forego the delights of her friendship.

He felt that his most telling argument would be to explain that his sense of honor which had been numbed, as it were, by her beauty and fascination, was awake, and accusing him of disloyalty to his affianced; and as his honor was dear to him, "dearer even than Rosalind's own sweet self," "he knew he could not endure the pain he would suffer, did he feel he had brought a stain upon it." And finally he begged her to forget anyone so worthless as himself, and hoped she would be happier with the man who was more worthy of her."

Now, through a bit of carelessness, an accident happened, which has happened before, and will doubtless happen again.

Fane addressed two envelopes, folded the notes, and slipping what he thought was the propitiatory note intended for Amy into the envelope addressed to her, he sealed it, did the same with the other, and running down stairs, left them on the hall table, ready for the servant to put in the post box in the morning. They would reach their destination on Monday morning, and he would be made all right with one of the young ladies, at any rate.

As Amy met Montrose and Fane when they were ushered into the drawing room at Mrs. Lester's that evening, there was that in her reception of her lover which might have disconcerted a bolder youth. It was not indignation, it was not contempt, it was not amusement, but it was a discomfiting mixture of all three. Not dreaming of the true state of affairs, Fane tried to make himself more than usually agreeable, hoping, thereby, to clear matters up, but met only with chilling politeness for his pains.

The next morning beside his plate at breakfast lay two letters. He tore open the uppermost, quickly, recognizing Amy's handwriting. The note ran—

DEAR MR. FANE,—

I regret to have unwittingly read that which is evidently intended for some one else, and return it at once, that it may reach its destination as quickly as possible. Pray, do not think of making the sacrifice you mention in it. Yours, in haste,

AMY LESTER.

The other was almost as short, and equally full of meaning. It read—

CHARLES FANE,
Sir,

inclosed you will find a note as is plainly meant for some young Lady as I hope will never get took in by you. don't you never show your face near again. My daughter's feelings is hurt now but she'll be all right when she takes in a good ridance of Bad rubbish.

Yours respectfully,

MICHAEL ALDERN.

Two years later, a couple of young men were talking at the club, when one remarked that he had heard that day that Charlie Fane was coming back from British Columbia.

"What did he leave for?" asked the younger of the two. "I never heard the rights of it."

"Oh!" replied the first speaker, "Tried to work a double game, a girl here, and some fascinating Maud Muller in the country; wrote to them both the same night, and mixed the letters, with such immediate results from both quarters that Fane found some mining interests of his father's in British Columbia needed looking after, and left at once for the West."

Fane did come home, and in the paper that he bought at the Union Station, two items in the births, marriages and deaths column met his eye—

MONTROSE—LESTER—On September 18th, at St. Bonifacio Church, by the Rev. John Jones, Harold C. Montrose, second son of —. Montrose, Esq., — Hall, — Shire, Eng., to Amy, only daughter of James Lester, Esq., Toronto.

And—

WILLIAMS—ALDERN—On September 18th, at Church of St. Helen, Nemica Falls, by the Rev. Henry Stubbs, John Henry Williams, English Master in Bay View Collegiate Institute, to Rosalind, eldest daughter of Michael Aldern, Nemica Falls.

Could the reader have been on board the East bound trains the day the above-mentioned events took place, he would have heard two conversations, which, though differing somewhat in form, were very similar in substance.

A slender, fair-haired girl was saying with that little tripping laugh, which was one of her chief charms, to the man who was bending over her with a look of infinite tenderness in his dark eyes, "To think, Harold, its just two years ago to-day since I got that note from Charlie Fane. I felt as if I could cry myself into a perfect Niobe with mortification, at having been such a silly as to fancy myself so awfully in love with him, and telling him I was, too!" added this twenty-one year old matron, shamefacedly. "But," brightening, and with an assumption of magnificent dignity, "I was very young then, and didn't know any better."

"You were the dearest girl in all the world then, just as you are now," was Montrose's conclusive answer.

On another car, two passengers attracted much attention, not so much from the fact of their being evidently a bridal couple, but for the glorious beauty of the bride's face and form.

Noting the glances of admiration directed to his wife, the man whispered wistfully, "My darling, can you be content with me?"

"Content!" and the shining of the beautiful eyes bore testimony to the truth of her words, "I'm the happiest woman in Canada. And I know now, beloved, that I loved you even when, foolish schoolgirl that I was, I was looking round anxiously for some body, with a sufficiently romantic flavor attached, to which I could devote myself, soul and body. It doesn't seem possible that I'm the girl who two years ago was exultingly contemplating suicide. I wonder you can care for me, Jack."

"Care? Oh! my darling!" And after a few minutes' pause Jack Williams' musical voice quoted these words of Tennyson, than which there could be no better delineation of a perfect marriage:—

"My bride,

My wife, my life. Oh, we will walk this world,
Yoked in all exercise of noble end,
And so, through those dark gates across the wild
That no man knows. Indeed I love thee; come,
Yield thyself up; my hopes and thine are one;
Accomplish thou my manhood, and thyself,
Lay thy sweet hands in mine and trust to me."



For Ladies Only.

It may be that your wife would rather have a
kind word and new clothes now, than
wisdom and a hundred dollars in the future.