

A LOVER FROM OVER THE SEA.

(Continued.)

The party from Thornwood were rather late, and all the performers with a part of the audience, were gathered round the doorway in the soft summer twilight awaiting the arrival of the Twisden omnibus.

Apparently it was Mr. Grantley's intention to efface himself as much as possible from public notice that night.

Colonel St. Aubyn, emerging from the depths of the omnibus, congratulated himself on the fact that the new steward had withdrawn into the background, and noted with approval that instead of having donned the evening clothes of society, he wore his ordinary suit of brown velvet.

"Better taste than I would have given him credit for; shows he recognizes his position well enough, if only those who ought to know better would not try to spoil him!" mused Lady Olivia's guardian complacently as he made his way towards one of the better-class seats already more than half occupied, and prepared heroically to endure the martyrdom of cramped knees and squeezed elbows for the remainder of the evening.

The concert, which was of a very miscellaneous character, opened with the "Canadian Boatmen's Song," sung very creditably by the choir. Then came a humorous recitation from *Pickwick* by the Rector, followed by a feeble rendering of "Come into the Garden, Maud," by one of the young curates. A duet, "As it fell upon a day," was next on the programme, sung by Lady Olivia and Mr. Grantley. This was rapturously encored, much to Colonel St. Aubyn's annoyance. As the two voices rose and fell sympathetically together, and the quaint words of the old song—

"Then as she did thus complain,
Scarce I could from tears refrain"

—stole softly across the room, wedded to their sweet sad melody, he could hardly refrain from exclaiming, "Phsaw! What folly!"—and he bestowed but scant courtesy on the Twisden girls, who, seated on either side of him, their draperies flowing over his knees, their gigantic red fans flapping in his face, plied him with ceaseless questions about the new steward. Where did he come from, and who was he? How did "dear Olivia" manage to pick him up? To be sure she had always such good taste! Of course he was a gentleman—any one could see that! And how unconventional of him to keep on his morning clothes! Colonel St. Aubyn must introduce him; "papa" had taken such a fancy to him at the cattle-fair last week—considered him such a fine fellow, and a wonderful judge of stock!

It was all exceedingly exasperating and annoying to the Colonel; the only consolation he had was that Olivia, the duet ended, returned at once to her seat among the audience, whither Mr. Grantley did not attempt to follow her. During the remainder of the concert the steward stood, when his services on the platform were not required, half hidden by one of the red curtains that draped the side of the stage, a silent observer of all that was going on.

Presently there was a slight stir among the spectators; old Miss Graham had discovered a draught, and, in the change of places that ensued, Mr. Muggerridge contrived to secure a seat next to Lady Olivia. Possibly he was less offensive than usual that night, or she may have been in a particularly gracious state of mind; whatever the cause, her ladyship certainly made herself more agreeable to him than she had ever done before. Colonel St. Aubyn, watching the millionaire's ugly sick black head in close proximity to the fair soft locks and delicate profile of his cousin, felt hope revive once more within his breast, and vowed vengeance against Sir John Twisden when that worthy, having shouted "John Peel" until he was hoarse and had nearly deafened his listeners, sank exhausted into his seat once more, thereby necessitating a summons for Lady Olivia to take her place as accompanist to a ballad sung in a quavering soprano by the Doctor's niece.

The entertainment was drawing to a close. "To be, or not to be?" recited by the master of the grammar-school, was safely over; so was a fantasia on 'ish airs, trolled out on the flute in a gentleman-like manner by Mr. Timson, Doctor Graham's assistant. The performers, vocal and instrumental, were all assembled together on the stage to sing a verse of the "National Anthem," as a fitting conclusion to the performance, when a slight accident occurred. One of the gay Chinese lanterns, fanned by the wind from a suddenly-opened door, caught fire and fell in a bright flame upon Lady Olivia's light dress. There was a panic at once, which was however quelled almost as soon as it rose. Some one tore down one of the red cloth curtains from the stage and wrapped her ladyship closely in it, holding the slight figure to him with an iron grasp, while stamping vigorously upon the draperies beneath his feet.

It was over in a minute. Lady Olivia, pale, dishevelled, but unhurt, although one side of her pretty pale blue frock was brown and shrivelled from waist to hem, emerged from the folds of crimson cloth, and was immediately surrounded by a crowd of sympathizers, open mouthed, eager-tongued, with hurried words of commiseration at the unlucky accident and of congratulation on her fortunate escape.

In the general commotion Mr. Grantley, by no means anxious to pose as a hero, quietly disappeared. A search for his soft tweed hat detained him for some minutes in the tiny back-passage where the gentlemen had placed their hats, and he emerged from it just in time to see the Twisden's omnibus drive off, and to find himself the centre of a little knot of men gathered on the schoolhouse door-step.

"Here he is!" exclaimed Sydney Irvine excitedly, darting towards the steward, and seizing both his hands vigorously.

"Oh, Mr. Grantley, where have you been? We thought you had gone

home; and Olive wanted to thank you. She told me to tell you— Oh, you are burnt!" exclaimed the boy quickly, his face turning pale in the moonlight as he caught sight of the fingers which Philip Grantley, with an involuntary cry of pain, released hastily from his eager clasp. "Father, just look at Mr. Grantley's hand! He—"

"It's nothing—a mere blister, I assure you," said the steward rather impatiently, putting both Mr. Irvine and Doctor Graham aside, and approaching Colonel St. Aubyn, who, a light dust-coat thrown over his evening clothes, was lighting a cigar preparatory to a solitary walk home. "May I ask you for a light, sir?" he enquired courteously. "I have managed to drop my own fusee-case somehow—in the confusion, I suppose." He lighted his cigar somewhat awkwardly with his left hand, keeping his right studiously behind him. "Lady Olivia will not be the worse for the fright, I trust. The fire was out fortunately almost as soon as it was alight, but not without some danger to her dress, I fear."

"Lucky she escaped as she did—thanks to your quickness and presence of mind," responded the Colonel rather ungraciously. He felt bound to make the steward some faint acknowledgement for his timely services, even though his having rescued Lady Olivia from the chance of a horrible death was the one thing wanting to make him completely obnoxious in her guardian's eyes. "Detestable inventions, those Chinese lanterns!" he continued, feeling it a relief to be able to grumble to somebody. "Fancy any one but an idiot putting a lighted candle inside a paper bag, and expecting it not to catch fire at once! Folly—like all the rest of it! Folly!"

The Colonel walked on impatiently down the short piece of high-road shut in on either side by high hedges which intervened between the Camrsham school-house and the two field-paths leading to Thornwood. He halted at the first little white gate for his companion to overtake him.

"Your way is mine, is it not? I'm glad of it. I wanted five minutes' conversation with you," said the Colonel rather abruptly. "You see, you must excuse my speaking plainly," as the two men walked side by side; "but the truth is, you are new to the work, and a stranger, and so forth, and it will never do for you to let Lady Olivia imbue you with any extravagant notions, or to encourage her in any schemes or experiments for improving the tenants' cottages, or, in fact, doing anything that runs into money. Her income is very small—quite inadequate for her position indeed—and, until she does what I hope and trust she will do before very long, marry a man of large fortune, the only thing for it is to cut down every fraction of expenditure as much as possible, and make the most of everything, with the least conceivable outlay. In my opinion," continued the Colonel, becoming confidential as he found he had succeeded in obtaining the close attention of his listener, "it is a most ill-advised thing to open Thornwood at all until Lady Olivia can come down here with a sufficient establishment and keep up the house and grounds in proper style. As it is, she wastes her time and her money dawdling about the place among a lot of old women and children, mixing in society that is beneath her, and placing herself on terms of equality with people whom she would be forced in self-defence to cut if she met them afterwards in London."

He paused, with a side glance at his companion, anxious to see how he received such hard hitting; but Philip Grantley's countenance remained immovable.

"And is there any chance of her ladyship's making such a marriage as will enable her to keep up the Manor in the way you describe?" inquired the steward at last, without removing the cigar from his lips.

The Colonel beamed with delight. This was precisely the question to which he had been leading up.

"Well, between ourselves," he answered, growing almost familiar in his intense satisfaction—"this is strictly in confidence, you know—I look upon the affair as *un fait accompli* from to-night. Lady Olivia is capricious and fanciful, like all women, full of quips and cranks, as you have doubtless found out by this time; still I don't think she is altogether blind to her own interests, and I hope before long that Muggerridge may be made a happy man. You see they will be staying in the same house in Scotland—no doubt her ladyship has told you that she is due at Sir James Cardew's on the twelfth. I hope to induce her to travel back to town with me on the day after to-morrow. Muggerridge has a princely income, my dear sir. Fine time for you all at Thornwood if Lady Olivia installs him as master here! You observed him to-night, of course, sitting beside her during the latter part of the concert—a small dark man, not very imposing in his appearance perhaps, but rolling in riches!"

Colonel St. Aubyn paused for a reply, but Philip Grantley made none. The young man stood silently, with one hand upon the last white gate that divided the field from the Thornwood plantation, gazing upon a mental vision of Lady Olivia on the evening when he had first met her. They had lingered almost in that very spot to listen to the nightingale's song. How pure and tender he had thought her then—how incapable of any act that a man might censure! And now? Well the time of nightingales was past—the summer, with its brief joys, was waning. He had been a fool, living in a fool's paradise of his own creation—a slave, a toy, a live chattel, ministering to a fine lady's whim; the pearl of great price that he had come so many thousand miles to find had proved to be only dross and tinsel.

"I noticed the man you mention sitting by Lady Olivia this evening," he said, after a long pause, finding that Colonel St. Aubyn appeared to await some rejoinder. "He looked to me like an arrant little snob with a glass stopper stuck in his shirt-front instead of a decent button; but of course I am no judge of such things. There were a good many just like him about Sydney, but naturally I never mixed with them. As you say, money, and plenty of it, is what is wanted at Thornwood; the sooner Lady Olivia and Mr. Muggerridge come to an understanding the better for her tenants and the estate, I should say."

"Just my own opinion!" returned Colonel St. Aubyn heartily; he was