

A Chance Introduction.

Delayed by a railroad accident and compelled to remain over Christmas at Fordville. Here was a predicament for an overworked reader of a popular magazine off for a hard-earned holiday.

What made it the more exasperating was that I happened to be on my way to visit some friends who had with them a young lady guest who had been described to me as such a paragon of loveliness and worth that I had quite settled it in my mind that she was destined to prove the "inexpressible abe" whom I had hitherto sought in vain.

Fordville! Where had I heard the name before, and what association had I with the place? Diving deep into the recesses of my memory, I made the rather startling discovery that I had once actually had a correspondent in Fordville. It happened in this way:

A few months back a manuscript had been put into my hands for examination which, as I at once perceived, was the venture of a very young lady, whom I subsequently discovered to be a certain Miss Nelly Temple. This fact was stated in a confidential note to the editor, the young authoress desiring that only her nom de plume (a sweetly sentimental one) should be given to the world.

After reading her story, I had written the young lady, and the contents of my letter I now found it rather irksome to recall. After a somewhat more lenient criticism of her manuscript than was usual, I had been compelled to write and decline the honor of its publication. I had chosen this task myself instead of entrusting it to the corresponding clerk, because I had an irresistible desire, which I hardly knew how to explain to myself, "to let her down gently" as the phrase is. The fact is, the little letter that had accompanied the story interested and pleased me in inverse ratio to the effect of the work itself.

The letter was girlish, natural and frank, while the story was artificial,awkward and dismal. All the hearts were mere shattered wrecks, and all the hopes desolate and unrequited. The heroine sighed and sobbed her way through from beginning to end, and the hero only appeared upon the scene to glare about him with orbs of consuming gloom and to discourse solely upon such subjects as wasted hearts and blighted hopes, in a basso-profundo voice. In the end, although no reasonable obstacle to their union appeared, they were ruthlessly torn asunder, and the authoress dropped her curtain over them like a black pall. It was execrable, and there was nothing to do but decline with thanks. This I did in a note unnecessarily apologetic and diffuse, which had the effect of procuring me another letter from the young authoress. It was a pretty little epistle, as the other had been, and interested me much in the same way. She asked for counsel and advice, and appealed with awed timidity to my wide literary experience. She told me that she desired to make literature her profession, it being necessary for her to support herself, though, like Dr. Johnson's man, she acknowledged that she had several other irons in the fire. I refrained from imitating his advice and telling her "to put this where the other irons were;" but I confessed that the witticism recurred to me with a startling fitness. Two or three more letters passed between us, and then, though I had been really interested in the innocent young creature, I had, as it annoyed me to remember now, let the correspondence die out. It had left me, however, with a real curiosity as to her stature, experience and surroundings. It was strange that so very young a lady should have come to regard life as such a howling waste and the world so awfully hollow. Certainly I could imagine that she might prove rather melancholy company if her conversation and ideas resembled her heroine's, as of course they would. She had just the sort of writer to feel impelled to write an autobiography, and yet, though it seems paradoxical, while her heroine seemed to me the quintessence of dismal insipidity, I felt exhilarated by the thought [that my Christmas at Fordville was to be enlivened by the acquaintance of Miss Temple.

It was too late to make any effort to find out the young lady that night, so after eating a very well prepared supper at the village inn, which proved to be as comfortable within as it was dilapidated without, I went to bed and slept soundly, waking next morning in a frame of mind Mark Tapley might have envied. A bright wood fire was crackling on the hearth as I walked to the window and drew aside the curtain. Outside the ground was covered with snow, which had fallen during the night, and which new lap crisp and sparkling in the brilliant winter sunshine. I dressed hastily. The vital necessity of having a sleigh-ride at once presented itself, quickened by the sound of bells coming and going swiftly over the country roads.

After doing justice to a deliciously cooked breakfast I found my way to the front porch, where my host was walking up and down, enjoying his pipe. The beguiled question him as to the practicability of procuring a sleigh when the

sound of merry laughter smote upon my ear, and at the same time a dashing little creature with fluttering red ribbons appeared on the porch of the neat cottage across the way. She was a perfect little beauty, with a face from which the idea of merriment and good humor was inseparable. The peal of laughter which I had heard had evidently been directed towards some one in the house, for she stood alone upon the porch holding a scarlet woolen comforter in her hand.

"Look, Uncle Davy," she called out in a sweet, gay voice, "I've finished your muffler at last—just in time for the snowy weather!"

Hidden behind a wide open pillar, I listened with much interest, as the old man expressed his delighted thanks.

"But how am I to get it across to you?" the girl went on. "I know your rheumatism won't allow you to come for it, and the snow would be over my shoes."

As the dilemma remained unsolved I stepped from my hiding place and offered myself as Uncle Davy's messenger. Accordingly I descended the steps and crushing the untrodden snow beneath my feet, crossed over and approached the young lady. As I looked up at her I observed that though she was standing in the same attitude, holding the scarf in her hand, a marked change had come over her face, which now looked profoundly amused.

As I approached her, however, she responded very prettily to my bow, and when I swept off my hat with flattering deferentialness and explained that Uncle Davy had entrusted me with his honored mission of bringing him his scarf, she handed it to me with a very becoming flush and smile, and thanked me with a demure courtesy.

I did not feel at all like turning my back upon her and returning to the vicinity of the old hotel, but there was nothing else to be done, so I replaced my hat and found my way over to Uncle Davy and delivered the scarf. The old man received his present with the greatest delight, and after vociferously shouting his thanks across the street, turned and entered the house for the purpose, as he explained, of exhibiting the scarlet trophy. As he vanished down the narrow hall, I heard him call out:

"Wife, where are you? Come and see the pretty present Miss Nelly Temple has sent me."

Miss Nelly Temple! Here was a surprise. I remembered now that I had heard him call her Miss Nelly, but I had been so engrossed at the time that the name had not struck me, and I had for the moment, forgotten the existence of my melancholy young high-tragedy authoress. How could she possibly be identical with that piquant little beauty yonder? And I raised my eyes to draw the contrast, only to discover that she had disappeared.

I hesitated for a moment as to my course, but as I recalled the very grateful and admiring tone of her last letter to me, which had convinced me at the time of its receipt that she had put me on a pedestal along with Emerson, Holmes and Longfellow. I thought I might venture to take a decisive step, without more ado, I took my way again across the street, and, walking boldly up the steps, knocked at the door. As I did so I caught sight of some scarlet ribbons screened behind the muslin curtains of the window going on the porch, which now, however, quickly disappeared. Then I could hear, where I stood, a whispered conference in the hall, and then, in a minute more, the door was opened, not very wide, by a negress, who regarded me rather wrathfully as I said, composedly:

"I want to see Miss Nellie Temple, if you please."

"Well, you can't see her then, sah," was the prompt reply.

"Why not?" I asked, quietly.

at the hotel whom I did not know, and felt almost frightened; and I was rude, I'm afraid. You have been so very kind about taking the time to answer my letters that I am ashamed to have given so much trouble."

She addressed me with so much respect that I experienced something of the sensation of a literary lion, for the first and probably the last time in my life, and set myself at once to the task of putting her at ease. I inquired about the story, and expressed a deep anxiety as to its ultimate appearance in print, assuring her that it needed only a little thoughtful revision to make it a shining success, thereby undoing all my earnestly laid plot to discourage her from writing more, which I had subtly introduced into my letters. I saw that she listened with delightful surprise, and I waxed more and more eloquent, expressing and certainly feeling ten times the emotion and enthusiasm that a talk with George Eliot would have inspired. It was delicious to call up such a happy light into those lovely eyes and such a confused pleasure to the sweet voice that responded to me. I was playing the idiot, but I had completely lost my head. After a long talk she explained, with much hesitation, that she would be obliged to get ready for church, as she played the organ and must not be late, and when I asked, feeling a strange timidity myself, whether I might be allowed to accompany her, she told me the church was several miles away and that an uncle and aunt who lived in the country would call for her in their reckaway.

"But wouldn't a sleigh do as well as a reckaway?" I asked a delighted project suggesting itself. "Perhaps I might get a single sleigh and drive you out!"

She hesitated a moment, and I could see that the project delighted her. So I said no more, but returned to uncle Davy, and procured the use of a shabby little box on runners, with a steady little horse, and when I appeared at the door opposite I was soon joined by Miss Temple, who looked prettier than ever in a coquettish little fur muff and collar.

A few minutes later we were skimming over the country roads with hearts as light as air. I had forgotten my friends who were expecting me elsewhere—forgotten the brilliant young lady who had been good enough to express some interest in my coming. I had forgotten everything and everybody on earth, indeed, except the bewildering little being beside me.

"It was so kind of you to come with me," I said. "How can I ever thank you enough? It shows me what a generous and confiding nature you have, and you never shall regret it."

"Why of course, I was delighted to come with you, Mr. Moore," she said, looking at me with wide, questioning eyes. "I am sure I ought to do everything you ask after all the valuable advice you have been kind enough to give me."

When we reached the church I could see that my appearance was perceived with great surprise by Nelly's young friends in the choir, which was increased by the fact of my joining in, brave and strong, in the music which Nelly accompanied and led. She praised my singing very highly afterward, and said my voice furnished just the support hers needed. What a happy day that was, and what a never-to-be-forgotten thing was our ride home.

I went over and spent that evening with Nelly, and she took me into her confidence and friendship in the sweetest way in the world. Of course she introduced me to her people, and I had to be inspected by them, but I soon found that they were all her willing slaves and her approval of me was the only guarantee they required. Indeed they were, one and all, so unconventional and unworshipful that I felt a little uneasy at the thought of my dear little Nelly's being without a more capable protector, and not averse to assuming the position myself. I wrote to my friends and made some convenient excuse for not joining them and spent all my holiday in Fordville.

At my own request one evening Nelly brought out the familiar manuscript and we read it over together. I managed to keep down my irreverent laughter at its reiterated sighs and sobbings and complainings. Only once, in the principal love scene, in which was reached the acme of its dismalness, I looked up at her, shyly and said:

"Is this really your idea of love? Do you believe when two people are in love with each other that they go through all these dreadful tortures and suffer all these agonizing pangs?"

To my utter amazement, she replied by snatching the pages out of my hands and throwing them into the fire. As I sprang up in my vain endeavor to check her, I caught her two hands in mine, and having caught them, I held them.

your critic and instructor, and if you'll let me teach you this one lesson, and will try to learn it faithfully, you will have reached such a state of mature development that you will need no more culture. Only learn what it is to love truly, and allow your teacher to select the object, and you will possess all the knowledge and cultivation he will ever require of you."

It came upon her very suddenly and a few preliminary exercises were necessary before she was quite satisfied as a pupil, but the giving those lessons was the greatest joy I had ever known, as the result of them was I considered the finest success of my life. Uncle Davy was much surprised at the turn of affairs and a good deal puzzled at the preliminaries, or rather the lack of such.

"Lor, I never dreamed of his being Miss Nelly's young man," he said to his wife.

"I wonder why he's never been to Fordville before," returned the good woman, meditatively.

"I asked him about that," said Uncle Davy; "but he kinder smiled and said that, though he had never been to Fordville before, he had for some time been in correspondence with the place, and that Miss Nelly was far from being a stranger. I suppose she met him when she was off on that visit last year and has been corresponding with him ever since."

This explanation was circulated throughout the town, as I intended it should be, and seemed to be entirely satisfactory. I had a bold plan of hurrying up the wedding when once I had secured Nelly's consent, and so successful did this prove that two months after that day on which I first made acquaintance with Fordville, Nelly and I were married there.

And to think that all this came about through that dismal story that Nelly and I have such laughs over now!

Well, let those who may climb to the loftiest heights of literary eminence, I shall not grudge them their success. Being a rather overworked and underpaid reader for a magazine may not be considered the pinnacle of literary glory, but it has been the means of winning me a treasure which I would not exchange for the fame of Shakespeare.—[Detroit Free Press.

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