

THE FLOWER AND THE SUN.

The sun one summer's day had softly wooed
A white carnation, with his golden gleams;
But all in vain for she, the pretty prude,
Would not be warmed to love by sunny beams.
For white carnations coyness express—
No flower coy as she was ever found.
She strove to hide amid a pretty tress
Of green and golden hair that grew around.
She tried to turn her face to meet his gaze;
And as he smiled upon her from above,
Oh, for some kindly hand her crest to raise,
As drooped her head before his ardent love.

A rain-cloud wept for him: that flood of tears—
As unrequited he was seeking rest—
That frown whose bosom floats both hopes and fears

Found a response while falling on her breast.
She raised her head: the dying sunbeams rushed
With ruddy joy forth from the cloud above;
They shined on her, the carnation blushed
Into a pink one, or a woe man's love!
Rejoicing Nature testified the while
His beaming gladness in an arched smile.

LESTELLE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE ROSE AND SHAMROCK," ETC.

CHAPTER XVI.

PREPARING FOR THE NUPTIALS.

Lady Ida and her father were at issue respecting her marriage, for which an early day was appointed. The bride elect, mindful of promises made to intimate friends, proposed that the ceremony be celebrated at St. George's, with all the detail a dozen bridesmaids, &c., could give to it; while the Earl—pleading his lady's delicate health, and the estrangement still existing between him and his son—wished for a more quiet affair, at the church adjoining his own estate. Darcy chose to be passive in the discussion that arose; he really cared very little whether he espoused Ida in the country or in town, and eventually the will of the young lady prevailed.

The remonstrances of Darcy, and a strong desire to see his sister happily married, combined to bring Percy from his seclusion, and a hollow reconciliation took place between him and his parents. The Earl was shocked to see him looking pale and hollow-eyed, but attributed it to the dissipated life he had been leading; while Ida and her mother were too much absorbed with bridal finery to notice his wasted hands, or the cough that racked his attenuated frame; only Darcy watched him with great anxiety, and refused to be satisfied with ambiguous replies to his questions.

"It is no use telling me that you are not ill, while I see you so weak and spiritless. You must consent to see a physician."

He was about to ring the bell, when Darcy prevented it.

"My dear fellow, I wish you'd let me alone. If I choose to consider myself well, why strive to convince me to the contrary? I have seen a physician, and he was frank enough to tell me that he could not cure me. Now are you satisfied?"

"By no means. I must know the name of this incurable malady, before I place any degree of faith in this inability of the medical profession to cope with it."

"I'll whisper it to you before I die," said Percy, smiling sadly. "The doctors who care to earn their fees would tell you that I am nervous, or bilious, or consumptive; but why should I—who know to the contrary—swallow their nauseous doses?"

"For the satisfaction of your friends, who are more hopeful of your recovery than you profess to be," Darcy promptly replied. "Let me send for Gilmore or Percival, and let them prescribe for you."

"Darcy is right," said the Earl, in whose study this conversation had taken place. "It is but a poor sign of penitence to throw health recklessly away."

Percy bit his lips at this allusion to his past life, but he did not resent it. He had grown wonderfully gentle and forbearing, clinging to the society of his cousin with all the affection of earlier days. Whether he cherished an attachment for Lestelle, or whether he visited her during those hours the Countess and Ida devoted to visits and visitors, Darcy could not summon courage to ask; and the Earl was equally silent on the subject.

One morning, Percy was sitting over the fire, which had been lighted on purpose for him, shivering and coughing every time the door was opened, and yet taking a vivid interest in the instructions for settlements which the Earl's solicitor was receiving from the bridegroom.

Lord Glenaughton lay back in his easy chair, seldom speaking, but wearing a look of supreme satisfaction at the progress of affairs. Once only he deprecated Darcy's very generous intentions.

"This is too much, my dear boy. If Ida's dowry had been fatherly it might have been settled on the papa don't-children, and then—"

But now you were stopped.

"Whom him all the sum you named for my sister how good he? Let us be as just as we can, and still more annoyed at his brusquerie. last he said: account, or, rather, through 'I cannot prove, that I am obliged to go with an I intended."

"But I shall want nothing more from you, father, except a grave," his son replied; "and Darcy will make a better use of your money than I should. Put down the other ten thousand pounds, Mr. Yately."

But Darcy laid his hand on the papers, for he saw that the speech had terribly unnerved the Earl.

"Let us defer all further discussion of the 2nd till to-morrow."

Mr. Yately started up with alacrity, and put his spectacles into his pocket. "The very thing I was wishing to propose; for I have an appointment at Lylo Street, at noon. Are you walking that way, Mr. Lesmore? I should be glad to say a few words to you in private."

Darcy looked surprised, for the solicitor looked significant and lowered his tone as he made this request; but thinking it would be as well to leave the father and son to themselves, he expressed his readiness to accompany Mr. Yately, and they quitted the house together.

"I am constrained to put some rather peculiar questions to you, Mr. Lesmore," the solicitor began; "but I have my reasons for them, which I will explain presently. Do you retain much recollection of your father, the Honorable Arden Lesmore?"

"No. I was a mere child when his death occurred. Why do you ask this?"

Mr. Yately, who was a very precise little old gentleman, waved his hand.

"One moment, my dear sir—one moment. Mrs. Lesmore, your highly respected parent, survived her husband some three or four years. How! the match was in every respect a happy one, eh?"

"To the best of my knowledge, yes," answered Darcy, trying to grow patient.

"Yes; and you have never had any reason to suppose or suspect that the Honorable Arden Lesmore had contracted any marriage prior to his union with Miss Henrietta Darcy? Now hear me patiently, my dear sir," he added, as the young man commenced an indignant disclaimer. "I told you that I have sufficient reason for making these inquiries. Tax your memory, and try and recall any hints you may have heard, any papers you may have found, which would imply that such a secret marriage was actually celebrated."

"I prefer to hear your reasons first, Mr. Yately. I don't care to be mystified on such a subject."

Mr. Yately tapped a paper he produced from his pocket. "They are contained here, sir. I received this document this morning, from White and Wellsley, a highly respectable firm, notifying to me their intention of calling upon you, Charles Darcy commonly known as the Honorable Darcy Lesmore, to resign all the moneys and estates you—as the reputed heir of the late Arden Lesmore—are now holding, to their client, who claims to be the only surviving child of the said Arden, by a marriage which was consummated in the year 18—, the mother of the said client being alive at the time you, sir, were born."

Darcy staggered back, and stared at the lawyer incredulously.

"It is impossible! My father was an honorable man, and I say again that it is impossible!"

Mr. Yately deliberately took a pinch of snuff, and meditated over it.

"My reminiscences of Mr. Lesmore would lead me to agree with you, only I cannot conceive White and Wellsley lending themselves to a mere sham. They must have had what appeared to them very convincing proofs of the legality of these claims, before they undertook to act for the person who alleges them."

"Then you would have me regard the matter seriously?" cried Darcy. "You do not consider it an infamous attempt to extort money?"

"Most certainly I do not! White is but an ordinary man; clever in his way, perhaps, but nothing peculiar. Wellsley, however, is thoroughly practical—keen, shrewd, and not easily led astray. If Wellsley has taken this up, depend on it there's something in it."

"Which something, according to their way of stating it," said Darcy, glancing through the letter again, "involves my legitimacy and position. Why, good heavens, it's monstrous to expect me to give any credence to this! My father actually the husband of another woman, when he wooed and won an heiress from one of the oldest of the county families! Pah! I shall treat the affair with the contempt it deserves!"

But Mr. Yately shook his head. "I'm afraid that won't do, my dear sir. I was really distressed on your account all the while I was sketching the draft of those settlements, for they will be void, absolutely void, if White and Wellsley's client be able to make good the statements this letter contains! We shall have to be wary, sir, and get a peep into the enemy's hands before we affect to despise his play."

Darcy thought awhile. Though his confidence in his father's honor remained unshaken, he saw that some greater proof was needed than his own solitary refutation of the charges brought against it.

"Will you see these lawyers for me," he asked, "and learn upon what foundation they base this strange story? Assure them from me that while I would not continue to hold property to which I have no legal right, yet that I will contest their claims to the utmost if they do not succeed in convincing me that they are just ones."

"Quite right—quite right!" assented Mr. Yately. "I will contrive to see Wellsley. White is slow, but I have a great respect for Wellsley. I'll have a friendly chat with him; it's not worth

while to declare war till we are obliged. The notoriety just now would be extremely unpleasant—for the lady especially."

But here Darcy broke in.

"My marriage?—you are alluding to that. It must be postponed, of course."

He did not say this as if overwhelmed at the prospect; but Mr. Yately chose to consider him so, and soothingly replied, "We'll hope not—we'll hope not. I may be able to bring you better news to-morrow. Where shall I find you about eleven, which is the only hour I can spare you?"

"At my uncle's, Lord Glenaughton's. He must be apprized of what has happened, and he may be able to render us invaluable assistance in rebutting the assertions of this mushroom claimant. Where has he been hiding himself all these years? I cannot think of this attempted imposition as coolly as you seem to regard it."

Darcy was fast losing his temper, for the more he dwelt upon the consequences that must follow any litigation, the more his annoyance increased. Mr. Yately saw this, and hastened to take his leave.

"Let us be patient till to-morrow, my dear sir. Let me advise you to put this very unpleasant affair quite out of your thoughts until you have heard my report."

"Excellent advice, if I could but follow it," Darcy replied, and they parted—the solicitor to busy himself with more pressing affairs, and his client to shut himself up in his chambers, and ransack desk and drawers for every paper and letter which was likely to bear upon his father's early life.

He had promised to escort Ida and Mrs. Lavington to a flower-show; but while tolerably positive that this claim to the Lesmore estate could not be a just one, it harassed him so much that he sent an excuse, and did not show himself at the Earl's until the following morning, a few minutes before the hour at which Mr. Yately had agreed to meet him.

Percy came into the room just behind him; he rarely cared to be solus with his father, and would generally watch at his dressing-room window for Darcy before he emerged from his own apartments.

It was the first to perceive that trouble sat on his cousin's broad brow, and to inquire what it was.

"Nothing more nor less than the prospect of a law-suit," was the reply.

The Earl looked up from the letter he was writing, and Percy shrugged his shoulders.

"I shouldn't have thought that a tussle with Dame Law would have disturbed your equanimity so much! What have you been doing?—taking possession of some hedge or ditch that doesn't belong to you?"

"Worse, if my opponent proves his case; for, according to his plea, I am not what I seem; or, in other words, I have no right to the name of Lesmore."

Exclamations of surprise burst from both father and son.

"Explain yourself, Darcy!"

But he pointed towards the solicitor, who was just entering the room.

"Here comes my informant. He can tell the tale with more patience and deliberation than I am able to muster. Have you seen White and Wellsley, Mr. Yately?"

"I have seen one of the members of that firm," the solicitor replied, as he seated himself; "and I regret to say that we are threatened with a great deal of unpleasantness, if nothing worse."

Darcy folded his arms and put his back against the mantelpiece, while Mr. Yately read to the Earl and Percy the letter which he had received on the previous day.

Lord Glenaughton wiped the perspiration from his brow as he listened. "This is terrible—it is infamous," he exclaimed. "What is to be done?"

"Hush, father," cried Percy, impatiently; "we have not heard all. Go on, Mr. Yately. What notice have you taken of this letter?"

"I have—with Mr. Lesmore's sanction—sought, and obtained, an interview with one of the members of the firm from whom this communication emanates—highly respectable men both White and Wellsley; but close, very close. They would not give me a glimpse at their tactics; but they assured me, without prejudice, that the evidence put into their hands warrants them in asserting that we have not a leg to stand upon."

Lord Glenaughton looked uneasily at his nephew, who had started from his easy attitude, and moved across nearer to the table, and then his lordship exclaimed, "Evidence! If they have any, why has it not been brought forward sooner? It is the vile scheme of some clever knave, depend upon it!"

Mr. Yately bowed in deference to the Earl's opinion, but went on: "Their case is that the Honorable Arden Lesmore, during a pedestrian tour in the south of England, visited Halesby, where he made the acquaintance of a young girl named Esther Waverill."

It was Darcy's turn to utter an expression of astonishment. It must have been long an episode in his father's life that he had listened when the Earl explained his interest in Lestelle. Turning a little from the rest of the party, the young man dropped into a chair, and shaded his face with his hand. He was right-minded and honorable; and his best feeling were wounded when he was compelled to believe that the parent whose memory he had so fondly revered had proved himself neither the one nor the other.

"This young girl," said Mr. Yately, reading from his notes, "was—so it is—"

away from her home by Mr. Arden, who married at a church near Winchester. By this marriage—of which White and Wellsley's clients allege they possess conclusive proofs—there were two children, the eldest of whom is dead, but the other survives; and it is on her behalf that her guardian proposes to institute this suit, unless we are prepared to renounce the Lesmore estates in favor of his ward."

"In favor of the actress, Lestelle! By Heaven, he shall not!" exclaimed Lord Glenaughton, dashing his hand fiercely on the table. "Is this miserable girl always to work us sorrow and perplexity?"

"Not a word against Lestelle!" cried Percy, confronting his father with flashing eyes. "This is not her doing—I swear that it is not—but Paulton's!"

"Paulton is the name of the lady's guardian," Mr. Yately commented. "W. Paulton; I have it entered here in my memoranda."

"It is some of his handiwork," Percy continued. "But Darcy must have his own, father!—he must have his own! Look to it sir—look to it!"

"Be silent!" was the stern reply. "Have I not borne enough for and through you, that you come prating and teaching me my duty to my brother's son? He shall not lose his inheritance, if anything that I can do or say can prevent it. My time, my money, is at Darcy's disposal, and I am ready to swear that this girl was not Arden's lawfully begotten child. What more would you have me do?"

"My dear uncle, Percy did not intend to convey any reproach to you by his hasty speech," Darcy gently interposed. "Indeed, both he and I are very certain, that although you may not act with the same hot-headed rashness that would characterize our proceedings, you will prove my best counsellor in this awkward affair."

The Earl was mollified. "I will defend your rights, my dear boy, and your father's honor. Arden Lesmore was not guilty of the crime imputed to him; I am certain of it. There was no such bar to his union with Henrietta Darcy as this would have been. He was one of the best and kindest of men. Such a burden on his conscience as that would have been, would have weighed him to the earth!"

Arden Lesmore's son wrung his uncle's hand, but he sighed as he did so, for he thought of Lestelle's deserted mother and her own neglected childhood. To be suspected of having sinned against the heiress of an ancient family, aroused the indignation of the dead man's nearest of kin, but the fact that he had undoubtedly duped an innocent rustic was not dwelt upon.

In the meantime, Mr. Yately had been poring over his note-book, and now looked up to ask if Lord Glenaughton could remember whether his brother really made this pedestrian tour, and under what circumstances.

The Earl glanced at Darcy, who answered for him.

"Yes, we admit my father's visit to Halesby, and his having made the acquaintance of Esther."

"Alone? Did he make this tour alone?"

"Partly," Lord Glenaughton replied. "At Halesby, I joined him for a week or so."

"He had become cognisant of the attachment?"

"I learned that he admired Esther," the Earl unwillingly acknowledged.

"And you left him still residing at that place?"

"No, we quitted the village together. I came back to London alone, for Arden proposed crossing to Ireland, and visiting the Lakes of Killarney, but I know nothing certain of his movements till we met in Paris, just before his union with Miss Darcy."

"This is unfortunate, as it opens a probability of Mr. Lesmore having returned to Halesby after your departure. Did not your lordship ever have any conversation with him respecting this girl?"

"Not until I was in attendance upon him during his last illness."

"And then?" queried Mr. Yately eagerly. "Pray tax your memory, my lord, and try to remember precisely what he said?"

"Nothing that could induce me to think that he had ever felt any disposition to make Esther Waverill his wife."

"This implies that our adversaries are correct when they assert that she quitted her native place with Mr. Lesmore," muttered the solicitor. "Can you remember the words in which his allusions to her were couched?"

"The subject is a painful one," said the Earl, after a long pause. "Nor do I see how a repetition of our conversation would serve any good purpose. Arden said that the girl's fate weighed heavily on his mind, and I promised to forgive some pecuniary aid, but not a word of such a marriage was uttered by either of us; and I repeat that I am convinced that my brother never loved her well enough to have dreamed of marrying her. She was a pretty, simple, uneducated girl, but she would have been a clog to any aspiring man."

"Very likely," said Mr. Yately; "but we must have something more tangible to work upon than our own convictions that Mr. Lesmore did not make a foolish match. We must find out where he went after he left your lordship, and we must bear in mind that those pretty, simple girls sometimes obtain immense power over the minds of their admirers."

Darcy looked annoyed. "You speak as if your own opinions were adverse ones?"

"Not at all, my dear sir; but we lawyers are obliged to look at both sides of every question; and, while my private conviction is that Mr.