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CONTENTS OF CURRENT NUMBER.

EDITORIAL.	
Home of the Maroons.....	4
Pauperism in Great Britain.....	4
Lessons of the Rebellion.....	4
Notes.....	4 & 5
Commercial and Financial.....	8
Rogers's Fishway.....	14
CONTRIBUTED.	
A Reminiscence..... "Veteran"	5
Educational.....	8
A Trip to Boston..... F. P.	9
Further Doings of the Major..... F. Blake Crofton	3
Scientific Gleanings.....	2
Cape Breton Railways and Mines.....	7
Snaps and Scraps..... Snarler	10
Religious.....	14
MISCELLANEOUS.	
Serial.....	1, 2
Mining.....	5
Shipping.....	13
Market Quotations.....	8
Agricultural.....	6
Receipts.....	6
News of the Week.....	12

LOVE'S MAGIC CHARM.

(Continued.)

"You are very good to me," she said. "You are the only one in the wide world who cares for me."

And with the words there came to her such a sense of loneliness and desolation as no language could describe. Of what use had been her beauty, of which her poor father had been so proud—of what avail the genius with which she was so richly dowered?

No one loved her. The only creature living who seemed to enter into either her joys or her sorrows was the kind-hearted, gentle governess.

"You must let me have my own way this time, Miss Hastings. One peculiarity of the Darrells is that they must say what is on their minds. I intend to do so now; it rests with you whether I do it in peace or not."

After that Miss Hastings knew all further remonstrance was useless. She made such arrangements as Pauline wished, and that afternoon they drove over to the Elms. Lady Hampton received them very kindly; the great end and aim of her life was accomplished—her niece was to be Lady Darrell, of Darrell Court. There was no need for any more envy or jealousy of Pauline. The girl who had so lately been a dangerous rival and an enemy to be dreaded had suddenly sunk into complete insignificance. Lady Hampton even thought it better to be gracious, conciliatory, and kind; as Elinor had to live with Miss Darrell, it was useless to make things disagreeable.

So Lady Hampton received them kindly. Fruit from the Court hot-houses and flowers from the Court conservatories were on the table. Lady Hampton insisted that Miss Hastings should join her in her afternoon tea, while Pauline, speaking with haughty grace, expressed a desire to see the Elms garden.

Lady Hampton was not sorry to have an hour's gossip with Miss Hastings, and she desired Elinor to show Miss Darrell all their choicest flowers.

Elinor looked half-frightened at the task. It was wonderful to see the contrast that the two girls presented—Pauline, tall, slender, queenly, in her sweeping black dress, all passion and magnificence; Miss Rocheford, fair, dainty, golden-haired, and gentle.

They walked in silence down one of the garden-paths, and then Miss Rocheford said, in her low, sweet voice:

"If you like roses, Miss Darrell, I can show you a beautiful collection." Then for the first time Pauline's dark eyes were directed toward her companion's face.

"I am a bad dissembler, Miss Rocheford," she said, proudly. "I have no wish to see your flowers. I came here to see you. There is a seat under yonder tree. Come with me, and hear what I have to say."

Elinor followed, looking and feeling terribly frightened. What had this grand, imperious Miss Darrell to say to her? They sat down side by side under the shade of a large magnolia tree, the white blossoms of which filled the air with sweetest perfume; the smiling summer beauty rested on the landscape. They sat in silence for some minutes, and then Pauline turned to Elinor.

"Miss Rocheford," she said, "I am come to give you a warning—the most solemn warning you have ever received—one that if you have any common sense you will not refuse to heed. I hear that you are going to marry my uncle, Sir Oswald. Is it true?"

Sir Oswald has asked me to be his wife," Elinor replied, with downcast eyes and a faint blush.

Pauline's face glowed with scorn.

"There is no need for any of those pretty airs and graces with me," she said. "I am going to speak stern truths to you. You, a young girl, barely twenty, with all your life before you—surely you cannot be so shamelessly

untrue as even to pretend that you are marrying an old man like my uncle for love? You know it is not so—you dare not even pretend it."

Elinor's face flushed crimson.

"Why do you speak so to me, Miss Darrell?" she gasped.

"Because I want to warn you. Are you not ashamed—yes, I repeat the word, ashamed—to sell your youth, your hope of love, your life itself, for money and title? That is what you are doing. You do not love Sir Oswald. How should you? He is more than old enough to be your father. If he were a poor man, you would laugh his offer to scorn; but he is old and rich, and you are willing to marry him to become Lady Darrell, of Darrell Court. Can you, Elinor Rocheford, look me frankly in the face, and say it is not so?"

No, she could not. Every word fell like a sledge-hammer on her heart, and she knew it was all true. She bent her crimson face, and hid it from Pauline's clear gaze.

"Are you not ashamed to sell yourself? If no truth, no honor, no loyalty impels you to end this barter, let fear step in. You do not love my uncle. It can give you no pain to give him up. Pursue your present course, and I warn you. Darrell Court ought to be mine. I am a Darrell, and when my uncle took me home it was as his heiress. For a long period I have learned to consider Darrell Court as mine. It is mine," she continued—"mine by right, for I am a Darrell—mine by right of the great love I bear it—mine by every law that is just and right! Elinor Rocheford, I warn you, beware how you step in between me and my birthright—beware! My uncle is only marrying you to punish me; he has no other motive. Beware how you lend yourself to such punishment! I am not asking you to give up any love. If you loved him, I would not say one word; but it is not a matter of love—only of sale and barter. Give it up!"

"How can you talk so strangely to me, Miss Darrell? I cannot give it up; everything is arranged."

"You can if you will. Tell my uncle you repent of the unnatural compact you have made. Be a true woman—true to the instinct Heaven has placed in your heart. Marry for love, nothing else—pure, honest love—and then you will live and die happy. Answer me—will you give it up?"

"I cannot," murmured the girl.

"You will not, rather. Listen to me. I am a true Darrell, and a Darrell never breaks a word once pledged. If you marry my uncle, I pledge my word that I will take a terrible vengeance on you—not a commonplace one, but one that shall be terrible. I will be revenged upon you if you dare to step in between me and my just inheritance! Do you hear me?"

"I hear. You are very cruel, Miss Darrell. You know that I cannot help myself. I must fulfill my contract."

"Very well," said Pauline, rising: "then I have no more to say. But remember, I have given you full, fair honest warning. I will be revenged upon you."

And Miss Darrell returned to the house, with haughty head proudly raised, while Elinor remained in the garden, bewildered and aghast.

Two things happened Elinor never revealed a word of what had transpired, and three weeks from that day Sir Oswald Darrell married her in the old parish church of Audleigh Royal.

CHAPTER XXIII.

NO COMPROMISE WITH PAULINE.

It was evident to Miss Hastings that Sir Oswald felt some little trepidation in bringing his bride home. He had, in spite of himself, been somewhat impressed by his niece's behaviour. She gave no sign of disappointed greed or ambition, but she bore herself like one who has been unjustly deprived of her rights.

On the night of the arrival every possible preparation had been made for receiving the baronet and his wife. The servants, under the direction of Mr. Frampton, the butler, were drawn up in a stately array. The bells from the old Norman church of Audleigh Royal pealed out a triumphant welcome; flags and triumphal arches adorned the roadway. The Court was looking its brightest and best; the grand old service of golden plate, from which, in olden times, kings and queens had dined, was displayed. The rooms were made bright with flowers and warm with fires. It was a proud coming home for Lady Darrell, who had never known what a home was before. Her delicate face flushed as her eyes lingered on the splendor around her. She could not repress the slight feeling of triumph which made her heart beat and her pulse thrill as she remembered that all this was her own.

She bowed right and left, with the calm, suave smile that never deserted her. As she passed through the long file of servants she tried her best to be most gracious and winning; but, despite her delicate, grave and youthful loveliness, they looked from her to the tall, queenly girl whose proud head was never bent, and whose dark eyes had in them no light of welcome. It might be better to bow to the rising sun, but many of them preferred the sun that was setting.

Sir Oswald led his young wife proudly through the outer rooms into the drawing-room.