

THE STAGE DRIVER'S STORY.

I know it's presumin' for one sich as me
Far to talk to a lady so grand.
It's like an' imp from Satan's dominions,
Chin' one from the heavenly land!
But you're axed for my story, ma'am, neat and perlit,
An' I'll tell it the best that I kin;
Leavin' out all that's rough or of vulgar degree,
Skippin' over all teches of sin.

I cum to these mountains in '50, and hyar
I've remained as ye see ever since;
I drove on the overland line till the keers
Stung the coaches 'way over the fence,
An' then I tried minin', an' went through my pile
In a manner most decently flat;
Then I chopped on that lay, an' got in for heerd
Texas cattle up thar on the Platte.

"From the States?" do you ask; yes, I just saw the
light
In Ohio, an' right thar I stayed
Till I tired of the civilize racket; ye see;
Couldn't coon to legitimate trade.
Then I picked up my duds an' bid—some one—good-
bye.

An' headed my boss for the West,
An' cum to these mountains to buck agin luck—
To swallow my dose with the rest!

"Got a wife?" looksee hyar, ma'am, I'd rather not talk
On sich subjects as that, fur ye see,
It moun't be flarin' to let out the truth;
It perhaps 'd reflect upon me.
"Got an object in axin'," ye say. Wal, I swear!
I can't see how I'd interest you:
An' I guess—eh?—"you must know." Wal, then,
ma'am, I had
A wife that was noble an' true.

You see, 'lar like this: When I lived in the States
Somehow I war all outen luck,
An' I stood in with nithin' but cussed hard times,
No matter what racket I struck;
Till at last I gin up an' concluded to leave—
An' Mary approved of the plan;
An' sed, "Go along Tom, an' when ye get rich
Ye'll find yer companion on han'."

But the same cussed luck follered right in my trail,
So I jist quit a writin' back home—
Fur I wanted the folks thar to think White war dead,
An' continued as usual to roam.
I stayed hyar an' thar—with no settled place
Fur to camp—with no object in view;
No ambition to make for more than enough
To grub me—indeed, ma'am it's true!

"Do I love Mary yit?" Why ma'am, I darn it all,
Thet smoke keeps a smartin' my eyes,
Makes 'em water as though I war drappin' sum weep—
When the wind's south thet smoke alters deef;
"Want an answer?" Wal, ma'am, I mus say (darn
thet smoke)—

I mus say thet in all these long years
She's bin right in my thoughts, an' many's the night
I lay thinkin' of Mary—in tears.

Her picter I carry right hyar in my heart—
Jist a thought of her fills me with bliss,
An' the day grows as dark as the bottomless pit
When I think praps she's dead afore this.
I've treated her shabby, but ma'am, I war hard luck
Thet made me shake home in thet style,
An' I'm boyin' till yit thet kerwin' 't soon change
An' begin to run right after a wile!

An' if ever I git jist a small stage ahead
I'm goin' to toddle back thar.
An' I'll ax Mary a pardon an' settle right down,
An' be decent—I will, ma'am, I'll swear!
What's that looksee hyar, ma'am, great heavens! jist
turn
Yer face more around ter this light!
Hist yer veil—great Lord of all mery above!
Why, Mary Elizabeth White!

WYOMING KIT.

A FORCED MARRIAGE.

There are many charming sentiments connected with clanship, and it cannot be denied that union in families is delightful to witness; but of even such good things as these one may possibly have a little too much. So, at least, thought young Hugh Lestrage when his grandfather affectionately intimated to him that the family of which he had the honour to be the eldest bachelor representative, unanimously considered it his plain and obvious duty to marry his cousin Pauline. Hugh's father had been dead some five years, and his great-uncle's grandson, Pauline's father, had fallen in the Franco-Prussian war; for the branch of the Lestrage family to which she belonged was of French nationality, and had but recently migrated across the water. There had been a family conclave, whereat it had been resolved and carried *ad referendum*, that the common interests, pecuniary and otherwise, of the house of Lestrage, would be materially advanced by the matrimonial union of the two young people. The result of this important conference being duly communicated to Hugh by his grandfather, and to Pauline by her mother, it was confidently expected that both cousins would regard the alliance in the same light as their seniors, and enact their respective parts with willing concurrence. Indeed, so far as Pauline was concerned, there could be nothing unusual or despotic to her in this parental arrangement of her future; for her French education and surroundings had accustomed her to the idea of family arbitration in matrimonial affairs and she was not, as are English girls, familiar with the notion of maidenly independence. She received the news of the proposed union with calm acquiescence; her cousin Hugues, as she called him, was not likely to prove an unkind husband, and she was content to let matters drift quietly to the desired consummation. Not so, however, the bridegroom elect. Hugh Lestrage felt that a distinct and deliberate injury had been done to him, and he resolved to resent it. But being a young fellow of amiable nature, hating arguments, and dreading open rupture, he confined the expression of his dissatisfaction to a few words of mild remonstrance, secretly determining the while so to conduct his part of the affair as to demonstrate unmistakably alike to Pauline's mother and to the young girl herself his utter inability to enter into the spirit of the new character allotted to him.

It was arranged that the necessary proposal should be made, and the courtship inaugurated at a certain country house to which, during the hunting season, both parties had been invited. Pauline had but lately quitted her school in Paris, Hugh had not long left Oxford, and some years had elapsed since their last meeting. Under such circumstances this renewal of old ties with a new intent was regarded by the family confederation as an event of critical interest.

On the evening of the day which witnessed the arrival at Shireton Manor of Madame Lestrage and her daughter, Hugh was deputed to conduct Pauline to dinner; and as the two cousins placed themselves side by side at the table, many inquiring and speculative glances were turned towards them by those of the guests who had been admitted to the secret. Indeed, they were a couple any family might have been proud to escort to the altar. The young man, now in his twenty-fifth year, was tall, bearded, stalwart, and fair-faced; Pauline, thoroughly French in feature and complexion, was yet not mean of stature; and though the national petulant and impulsive temperament showed itself in the curves of her lips, the truthful steadfastness of her brown eyes stood sponsor for a heart that was not empty of English blood. What a pity it was that, being so handsome a couple, and carrying with them the good wishes of all their mutual relatives, and a fine inheritance to boot, they could not find each other charming! But Fate will have her way. Throughout the whole of that critical dinner, young Lestrage, meditating on his wrongs, was unsociable, monosyllabic, and unpleasant. Pauline, disposed at first to accept with affability such affectionate advances as her cousin might make, when she perceived that none were vouchsafed, assumed a frosty reserve, and stood aloof on her dignity. During two hours—five courses and dessert—the pair sat side by side, prim, morose, and mutually unkind; and when the hostess rose, a thorough mistaking had been established. The incidents of the remainder of the evening confirmed the opinion each had formed of the other. The ice froze harder and harder over the hearts of both; and before Pauline retired for the night she disburdened her mind to her mother in voluble French, very much after the following fashion:

"Mamma, it is perfectly useless to tell me to marry Hugues; he is altogether odious and insupportable. As for him, he hates me; that you must all have seen plainly enough. He hardly spoke two words to me at dinner-time; and directly he saw me go to the piano, he went off to the smoking-room with Captain Lovell. He thinks himself too good for me, no doubt; you can see how abominably conceited he is by the contemptuous way in which he looked at everybody, and by his air of ill-bred reserve."

"But, Pauline dearest," pleaded Madame Lestrage, deeply chagrined, "suppose all this arises from shyness on his part? Remember, his position is rather a difficult one; and a young man brought up in English ways, as he has been, may feel more embarrassed than would a Frenchman under similar circumstances."

"Awkwardness is not charming," returned Pauline; "and a shy man is hardly better than a rude one. However, I will give him another chance to-morrow; but if he is not niver at breakfast and luncheon than he has shown himself at dinner, I will have nothing more to do with him. He is not the only husband to be had in the world, I suppose; and I am but eighteen after all, and just as good-looking as other girls. Good-night, dear mamma." And with a parting kiss and a satisfied glance in the mirror, Pauline passed light-hearted to her chamber.

But next day things were no better an aspect, and mademoiselle's second denunciation of her intended spouse was unequivocal and decisive. Hugh, on his part, saw reason to congratulate himself on the course he had adopted, and when he quitted the smoking-room at midnight, he had accepted a friend's invitation to leave Shireton Manor on the morrow for more congenial joys elsewhere.

"Certainly," said this recalcitrant young man, as he extinguished his candle, "I have acted wisely in getting out of this business. I should have been miserable for life if I had given in. What a monstrous thing it is in this century for a man's relatives to take on themselves the disposal of his liberty in such an outrageous way as this! Pauline is the last girl in the world to suit me, with her prim affliction of coyness and her ridiculous air of *petite reine*. I believe she has not an idea in her mind—these French-bred young women never have—and she doesn't know how to be natural and sociable and sympathetic. Whenever my time does come to turn Benedick, my wife shall be just as unlike mademoiselle *ma cousine* as possible."

So there was an end of this most excellent match, to the infinite disgust, vexation, and dismay of the intriguing parties. Hugh communicated to his grandfather in respectful terms, but with firm expressions, his absolute repugnance to the proposed alliance, and his unalterable resolution to undergo the worst that might happen rather than submit to it. And Pauline declared with immense fervour that rather than perform her share in the contract she would be cut in pieces or buried alive. In the face of such obstacles no more could be done, and after sundry futile reproaches and laments the family scheme was abandoned. Hugh was admitted to be a free man, and Madame Lestrage began to turn her thoughts to the pursuit of some other eligible *parti*.

But the cousins, however widely separated from a matrimonial point of view, were cousins still, and the unavoidable failure of mutually cherished hopes could not be permitted to effect an estrangement between the two branches of the family. Early in the Spring Pauline and her mother reappeared in London, and thither also came her only brother Jacques, but recently emancipated from the bonds of Alma Mater. Now Jacques was the chosen particular friend of his cousin Hugh, and although, being the younger man, he had entered the University later, they had during more than a year been fellow-students at the same Hall, and inseparable allies in all the pursuits and interests of college life. Therefore, immediately on his arrival in town, Jacques sought out his cousin, and within half an hour of their meeting the younger Lestrage was in possession of the details of the family machinations and theiasco consequent thereupon.

"I heard something about the affair from home," said Jacques, "but in such a vague way that I could make nothing of it. However, we need not trouble ourselves about the thing now, and I suppose you won't let it make any difference to you. Are you going to Lady Leigh's on Thursday?"

"Upon my word," answered Hugh meditatively, "I don't know. I was going, but I hear Pauline and your mother will be there, and that seems awkward, doesn't it?"

"My good fellow, you don't mean to say you are going to cut us on account of this untoward affair? You will have everybody gossiping about the thing if you behave so ridiculously, and you may injure Pauline's chances in a way you don't think of. Why should people know there has been anything contemplated between you? All sorts of tales will be told, a hundred times worse, every one of them, than the truth; and nobody need guess anything at all if only you conduct yourself rationally and in a natural manner. And really I cannot see why you should dislike meeting Pauline. There has been no regular quarrel between you, no jilting or jealousy, or anything of that kind; it was a simple mutual dissent from certain views entertained for you by older people who ought to have been wiser. Besides, it all happened four months ago, and the entire scheme has been dropped. Were I you, I would not only go to Lady Leigh's ball, but I would dance with Pauline, just to show friendliness and a disposition to put things back on the old footing."

This discussion ended as Jacques wished. Hugh promised not to absent himself from the ball in question, and he kept to his word. It was one of the first balls of the season, and was well attended. Pauline seemed to be a great success, and danced unwearingly. But shortly after supper, as Hugh, having handed his last partner to her seat, stood idle a moment by a doorway, his surprise was great at being lightly tapped on the arm by Pauline's fan, and hearing her say, as though echoing her brother's advice:

"When are you going to ask me to dance, cousin Hugues? I have just this waltz free if you like." Then in lower tones, "Do not seem to avoid me; there is no need for us to be strangers to each other on account of what has occurred. People will notice it, mamma says."

What could Hugh do? Impossible to refuse; and, besides, whether he danced with her now or not mattered nothing; their engagement had been formally nullified, and no attentions he might pay to her could be misinterpreted. After all, too, she was a handsome girl, and supportable enough as a mere cousin. A cousin may be tolerated and even danced with very agreeably, provided one is not expected to make her one's companion for life. So Hugh resolved to be pleasant. Perhaps, indeed, poor girl, he owed her some amends for his part in the recent failure of the family plot; at any rate, they stood now in no false light together, and there was therefore no reason for observing constraint or reserve in his manner towards her. And so the next minute the young man's arm was round Pauline's waist, and the pair were whirling together amicably down the room.

They paused at length by a conservatory, and Hugh found his partner a seat beneath a tall tree-fern.

"What a splendid waltzer you are!" he said graciously. "Did they teach you that in Paris?" She answered pleasantly, with a manner so unaffected, and a smile so bright, that Hugh recalled with wonderment the stiff primness which had characterized her every gesture and word when last they met. How, he asked himself, could four short months brought about so striking a difference?

Their talk flowed gaily on, for Hugh melted and warmed under the influence of his companion's gracious manner; until Pauline being in request for another dance, dismissed her cousin with a parting intimation that she hoped to meet him the following evening at the house of a mutual friend.

"We shall be there early," said she, with an ingenuous air. "If you like to come by ten o'clock I can give you the first quadrille."

Hugh went home bewildered; and, entering his room in the grey morning twilight, threw himself into an easy chair, and meditated there till sunrise.

What! The girl, so mindless, so wordless, so prudish, so unsympathetic, whom a mistaken devotion to the interests of kinship would have forced upon him as a wife, had suddenly changed her whole nature, and become genial, frank, intelligent, charming! Hugh could make nothing of the mystery. It did not occur

to him that he too must have appeared to Pauline that night under a new and very different aspect from that presented by the gruff and unamiable young man who had been offered her for a husband. Let that have been as it may, however, it is not on record that Mademoiselle Lestrage made any observation of this latter kind to her mother.

Lady Leigh's ball was but the first of a goodly number of dances and "at homes" at which the cousins were destined to meet. Hugh told himself that to attempt avoiding such meetings would be childish and affected; and that, moreover, as Pauline showed no evidence of embarrassment or annoyance in his presence, but, on the contrary, a most natural and perfect gaiety of speech and manner, he ought not to consider himself an obstacle to her enjoyment.

One circumstance only began, little by little, to disturb the peaceful equanimity of Hugh's existence. There was a certain Colonel Spiers Gordon, a tall handsome officer of the Hussars, with whom Pauline danced much, who rode often beside her in the park, and whose presence at Madame Lestrage's afternoon tea was not infrequent. It was, Hugh admitted to himself, supremely ridiculous to feel annoyed by such paltry incidents as these; for the Colonel was a man of the best reputation personally, and his pedigree and fortune was all that Mayfair could desire. Hugh examined his mind deeply on the subject, and found there nothing to account for the incipient mistrust and discomfort which this acquaintance caused him. Pauline was his cousin certainly, but in the third degree only, and his interest in her welfare was comparatively remote and of a merely friendly character. Doubtless his uneasiness arose from the incongruity presented to his mind by the idea of a marriage possibly taking place between so young a girl and the Colonel; for the latter must certainly have attained his fortieth year, while she was not yet nineteen. Hugh had sufficient regard for his cousin to feel some solicitude for her happiness as a wife, and to wish for her a husband at least more suitable in age than this gallant Hussar. Young Lestrage was not a little comforted at having thus satisfactorily solved the secret of his disquietude. It had looked at the outset so suspiciously like a latent flame of jealousy, that to feel assured of the harmlessness of its true nature was most gratifying. To have been jealous, even in the smallest degree, would have implied the existence of a feeling in regard to Pauline which it was absolutely and eternally impossible he should ever entertain; and he was well acquainted with the fact that she, on her part, held similar immutable views in respect of himself.

One brilliant May noontide Mademoiselle Lestrage, entering the breakfast-room on her return from her morning ride, found her mother apparently absorbed in meditation over a letter which lay open on a table at her elbow beside a cup of untasted chocolate. When she saw Pauline, she started slightly, and refolded her letter; but, observing her daughter's eye upon it as she did so, said lightly,

"From Colonel Gordon, dearest."

"No bad news, I hope?" asked Pauline, in the same tone, gathering up the folds of her habit, and contemplating the splashes upon it.

"How could there be any bad news from him?" returned her mother with some surprise.

"Only because I see it is a long letter, and as we meet him nearly every day, it is difficult to conceive what he can possibly have to write about."

"Is it?" said Madame Lestrage, with peculiar emphasis. "Can you not imagine, Pauline, that there may be some things a man would rather write than say?"

"If he says it in writing I don't see much difference," answered the girl, with a droil air. "But what is it he says—or writes?"

With a smile, Madame Lestrage put the letter into her daughter's hand.

Pauline read it hastily, the rosy colour gathering brightly over her face and throat; then, turning again to her mother, she said, in a low tremulous tone,

"So he wants me to be Madame Spiers Gordon."

"They call it 'Mrs.' in this country," replied her mother correctively, and with an expression of playfulness.

"Well, mamma, will you please say 'No'?"

"No!" echoed Madame Lestrage, astonished. "Surely, my dearest, you don't mean to refuse such an offer as this?"

"Why should I accept it?" returned Pauline. "I do not care for him as I ought to care for a husband, and it would not be right to say 'Yes.'"

"You plunge me in despair, Pauline; this is the second most excellent chance you have had within four months, and you decline both unconditionally. Tell me, my child, is there any motive for this behaviour on your part? Do you—can you be thinking of anybody else?"

As she spoke, Madame Lestrage rose and took her daughter's hand caressingly in her own. But there was no emotion in Pauline's rejoinder.

"Dear mamma, of course not. I don't want to marry Colonel Gordon, that's all. Is it so very inexplicable?"

"And you would not marry Hugh either; such a charming intelligent young man too, and exactly suited to you in every way. Est-elle difficile, cette chère Pauline?"

Pauline turned abruptly away, and seated herself by the window.