

AUTUMN.

BY JOHN FRASER.

I love the season when the corn-fields bright
Are reap'd and gather'd in,
I love the season when the low sun's light
Is sifted pale and thin;
When the clear atmosphere is purely bright,
The turbid heat gone by;
When winds are cool, and the thin curl-clouds
White
Hang deep within the sky.
The laboring circle of the year is done,
And rest is come for all;
The weary winds have well-nigh ceased to run,
The last red leaves to fall.
And when the gentle day is gently sped,
The moon comes out on high,—
Full, silvery, round, a queen in the sun's stead
Within the tranquil sky;
And heaven and earth beneath her glances glow
With magic misty light,
She floats in blue, with Jupiter below,
The planet most of light.
And meditation lifts her grave, bold eye,
And with suspended breath,
Thinks almost to have found in musings high
The keys of life and death.

THE GENERAL'S COUSIN.

IN TWO CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER I.

IN UPPER BROOK STREET.

"Mary dear, I have rather a headache; if there is anything you wish to do, I don't think I shall want the carriage to-day."
"Thank you, George, I don't think there is anything."

The speakers were sisters. Mary was Mrs. Green, the widow of Captain Green, who had died out in India; her age was twenty-five. George was Mrs. Royston, the wife of a rising lawyer; she was just a year younger than her sister.

They were seated in the prettily-furnished drawing-room of Mrs. Royston's house in Upper Brook street. The balcony was filled with choice flowers, and abundance of pretty nick-nacks were scattered about the room. They had just come up from luncheon; Mrs. Royston lounged in a low chair, twining with the silky ears of the dearest little Maltese; Mrs. Green walked to the piano and began turning over a portfolio of music.

A profound sigh from George—then a plaintive voice saying dolefully, "O, dear, my head is so bad! would you mind not playing just now, dear?"

"Not at all," and Mrs. Green turned from the piano. "Would you like me to read to you? that soothes you at times, you know."

"Thank you; but I don't think I could quite bear it to-day."

Mrs. Green taking up a piece of fine embroidery, destined to the future adornment of George, seated herself near the window, while George leaned back, with languid half-shut eyes, speaking now and then in low caressing tones to the treasure in her lap. Presently words grew audible, "Did he want fresh air, the poor darling? and were people so unkind to him, when he was not out all day yesterday, too, the dear precious pet! But his mistress loves him, does she not, sweet?" thereupon kisses on the white fluffy face.

A faint tinge of color crept into Mrs. Green's pale cheek, but she did not speak or move.

So, after the kisses, Mrs. Royston resumed, "Do you know, Mary, I really think a drive would do you good; if there is any rain it won't be more than a shower. The horses ought to go out, and James does not much like them being only exercised. I wish you would; and take dear Floss, he is actually pining for it. Will you, dear?"

"Yes, if you like, certainly; I have no objection. It was only that I thought you were offering the carriage for my accommodation."

"Of course, so I was," said the languid lady with much tartness; "but you have such a way of taking things, Mary; really there is no pleasing you nowadays."

"If you will order the carriage, I shall be ready in half an hour;" and Mrs. Green rose and put away her embroidery.

"Will you ring, then, before you go? I don't feel fit to move."

Mrs. Green went and rang the bell, and left the room, shutting the door softly; but once outside, her lips quivered and tears rushed into her eyes.

Poor Mrs. Green! No wonder that her face was pale; no wonder that, many a time, remembering the past, hot tears rushed to her eyes as they did now. It was, in truth, a painful change for the woman who had been used to be fêted and admired; to have her comfort cared for, her pleasure studied, by a husband's love. Not that George was actually unkind, but she was lazy, soft and selfish, and found it much easier to consult her own whims and wishes than her sister's.

That same evening they had a dinner-party at the house in Upper Brook street. Mrs. Royston sat at the head of her table beautifully dressed in blue silk and white lace; one dia-

mond star flashed in her golden hair, another glittered on her white bosom; her fair face was flushed and brilliant, her blue eyes sparkling; light talk and laughter bubbled from her rosy lips.

At her right hand was General Woolford. His dark head, sprinkled freely with white, was often bent to catch more easily the words that fell from his hostess' pretty lips, and, almost as often, when he raised it—sometimes even while he was listening—his eyes wandered away to a pale quiet face on the opposite side of the table, half-way down. The General, despite the difference of age and standing, had been an old friend of Captain Green's bachelor days, whose frank open nature had won the elder man's liking to an unusual degree. Mr. Royston had happened to meet him, and, as an old friend of Captain Green's, he had asked him to his house.

In the drawing-room, before the guests arrived, he had said to his wife, "I suppose, as a friend of poor Green's, the General will take in Mary?"

"Certainly not, James," said the pretty George from her throne—I mean her sofa. "What an idea! The General will take me, of course."

"All right, dear; you know best. But I thought—"

"Don't think, dear," and George went up to him, put a hand on his arm, and smiled up into his eyes; "don't think, dear, but tell me if I shall do?"

"Well, yes, George; I think you'll do."

Mr. Royston had been married four years, but in his own drawing-room, before dinner, he stooped and kissed his wife; he couldn't help it. And General Woolford, poor Green's friend, took her in to dinner; while Mr. Stebbing, an exemplary clerk in the Statistical Department—whatever that may be—look poor Green's widow.

George had the General, his head was bent down to her, his ear was all her own, but, alas! his eyes were not. They wandered most unaccountably to poor Green's widow. A grave still woman, dressed entirely in black, without a single ornament in dress or hair, who did not smile, and who spoke little. A woman with a face like that of a Greek statue, a clear pale complexion, dark brown hair and sad brown eyes, with very dark fine eyebrows.

This face, so young and so impassive, had a fascination for the General of the nature of that exercised by the changeless, unrevealing features of the Sphinx. He wanted to know what lay beneath, to see it stir, change, soften; grew half absorbed in watching it; so that he had but very moderate attention to give to his legitimate possessor, and came near to smiling acquiescence in the wrong places, and dropping Yes's and No's very much at random.

Alas for General Woolford! A man never knows when he is going to meet his fate. To think that he had lived to the age of fifty, free and untrammelled, only to fall in sudden and utter subjection before the penniless widow of a mere Captain Green! But the fact was so. Even before he spoke to her, all the outworks were taken, and when, in the course of that same evening, she sang him some of the old ballads which his soul loved, the very citadel was stormed, and the enemy lay at her mercy.

Need we say that times changed for Mrs. Green, almost as suddenly and as greatly as though a real good old-fashioned fairy had appeared and touched all the surroundings with her magic wand? It was a true transformation—scene—only the fairy was the world-worn, war-worn General. He sent flowers to Mrs. Green—the richest and rarest—new books, new music, opera-boxes; everything that could with propriety be sent he sent to Mrs. Green. He called on her, arranged for her to go to exhibitions and met her there; worshipped her, in short, in the most open and unblushing manner possible. Of course, Mrs. Green, the fortunate possessor of all these pleasures, became at once quite another person. No one could think of sending her out to air Floss and exercise the horses; no one could think of preventing her from playing, reading, resting, just as fancy prompted. There was a certain flavor of bitterness to her in the changed ways of those about her, arising from the knowledge whence the change came, but there was much more of pleasantness; and in the gratification she received from the General's chivalrous devotion there was no mixture of bitterness at all. There might have been perhaps if she had faced the palpable result; but the change was too wondrous pleasant to be over-closely scanned; she shut her eyes to consequences and let herself drift.

The fairy's wand touched her too, as well as her surroundings. In her cheeks fluttered a faint tint of rose; the knowledge that she was chosen and preferred gave dignity to her presence, lightness to her step, life and fire to the eyes grown heavy with long patience. Even George saw that she was very beautiful, with a beauty beside which her own prettiness waxed woefully insignificant.

For nine bright weeks the pleasant life went on. The General was in no hurry. His heart was too much set upon winning the prize to allow him to throw away his chances by over-haste. He waited patiently; working his way into her life and affections from day to day with much care and skill—the unconscious skill that comes of a warm true love.

But at the last, as so frequently happens with the best-intentioned and most careful of people, he spoke before he had intended it.

Going in one afternoon, he found Mrs. Green at the piano trying over some new music which

he had sent. She rose to meet him with a smile and a blush. George was out. He begged her to go on playing, then to sing for him—to sing his favorite "Auld Robin Grey."

With the General standing by her side she sang it. There was a strange nervous tremor over her. Her voice thrilled, trembled, faltered—then she mastered it, and sang the sad sweet song with a very passion of pathetic meaning.

The last notes died away—her hands lingered on the keys—the tears were in her eyes—her very heart was stirred with tumultuous feeling. The General stooped beside her—she felt that he was stooping—stooped till his head was as low as her own.

"Mrs. Green," he said, "Mary—shall I do for an 'Auld Robin Grey?' Will you be my wife?"

All the excited feeling seemed to rush back in a tide upon her heart; she turned deadly pale, and put her hands up to her face. "O General!" she said, as if entreating him—and that was all.

His face might have caught the paleness, it changed so quickly. "I have startled you—you did not expect, I see." She had risen. With a manner that had nothing of the lover, he put her arm in his, and led her to a low chair by the window; his help seemed needful, she was so white and trembling.

He got her a scent-bottle and a fan; then stood a little way off looking at her wistfully.

Presently, seeing her color coming back, he spoke.

"You are better now—I will go. I am sorry my abruptness startled you. I had hoped—but I was mistaken. Pray forgive me."

Saying these last words with a weak pained smile, pitiful to see on so strong a face, he went up to her and held out his hand. "Good-bye," he said, with eyes fixed on her face; her eyes were bent on the ground. She gave her hand and let it rest in his; then, as he dropped it, she raised her eyes, and, for one moment, looked into his face. Her lips were quivering, her eyes swimming in tears, but over all there lay a happy smile. "Mary!" cried the General; "why, Mary?" Then he opened his arms, and in another instant she was sobbing on his breast.

General Woolford had been a very patient wooer until his prize was won, but after that there was no patience in him. Reasons, fancies, difficulties of all sorts were swept aside by his impetuous will; settlements were drawn on precisely the same basis as if Mary had been an heiress, and signed; the trousseau was completed with a rapidity perfectly marvellous; and within a month Mrs. Green became Mrs. Woolford.

George and the General arranged the wedding between them. He wished to do all honor to Mary, she was exceedingly fond of gaiety and show; so between them they made a very brilliant affair of it, gathering together choice specimens of cousinhood, friendship, and acquaintance, until the house in Upper Brook-street had much to do to hold them; and regaling them, when gathered, in a highly sumptuous manner.

But to the General, even though his bride was there, the array of faces round the board was not quite perfect—there was one wanting: his first cousin and heir-presumptive, Charles Woolford, a much younger man than himself, who had come to look upon his heirship as an affair with no sort of presumption about it, as the General more than guessed, and whom he loved well; perhaps because he was to him the representative of family and kindred. He wrote from Paris to offer his congratulations; said how extremely he regretted that imperative engagements would prevent him from being present on so happy an occasion—all that was proper in fact—but he did not come; and the General felt sure it was because he would not. He would have liked a shake of the hand, a word of goodwill, from Charles on the entrance into his new life. He felt it to be unjust that his marriage should be resented; but consoled himself by thinking that he would soon get him down to Woolford, when Mary would speedily reconcile him to the existing state of things.

So the General thought. But then he was a bridegroom. And it was very much his opinion at that time that Mary was capable of reconciling any one to anything! At his age he should have known better, should he not? But age does not always bring wisdom in all things—there are even those who think that sometimes, in some things, it positively brings the reverse.

CHAPTER II.

AT WOOLFORD MANOR.

Woolford Manor is in the Midlands. A large, wide-spreading, gray old house, moss-grown by-places, looking over old-fashioned gardens, with two stone fountains, and a park whose chief feature is a chestnut avenue; situated in a well-wooded fertile country, with a winding river gleaming here and there; rich cornfields too, and many cattle. A place of plenty, ease, and wealth, looking very homelike.

In the early morning of a bright September day, Mrs. Woolford was in the garden cutting roses, when the General came out to her hastily, holding a letter in his hand. Full as he was of the news he had just had, he did not fail to admire the graceful figure and sweet face of his wife, that knew neither care nor trouble now, but turned with a happy smile at his approach. He looked at her very fondly. "Such news this morning, Mary," he said; "I am quite pleased. Charles has written to say that if we can take him in, he will come down on the 10th. I dare say the young rascal is after the partridges quite as much as us; still, I am very pleased to think he is coming."

"Then so am I, Harold."

"Ah, of course, you don't know him. No fear but you will like him though, he is a ladies' favorite"—just a shade of vexation crossed the General's face. "Well, boys will be boys, I suppose," he continued in a light tone. "Most of them, at least—and poor Charlie was very much left to his own devices."

"He is what is called wild, then?"

"They said so, but I don't think it—not now, at any rate. And he is my nearest relation, you know, Mary."

"Then he is sure of my welcome," and Mary smiled at her husband, "even if he is the wildest of the wild."

"Pooh, nonsense! nothing of the sort. I should not have said anything to you—don't know how I came to do it."

"Because, very properly, you say everything to me, do you not?"

"Almost, I think. O darling, how did I live so long without you!" After which General and Mrs. Woolford took a stroll round the garden together, and then went in to breakfast.

Some days later, in the afternoon, Mrs. Woolford was sitting alone in the library. She had walked with the General in the morning, and after luncheon he had ridden to Green Bottoms to look over the cover there. The library was a room Mrs. Woolford was very fond of. It had a large bow window opening on to a croquet-lawn as smooth as velvet, bounded on two sides by the ivy-covered walls of the kitchen-garden, on the other by a shrubbery of evergreens; a few bright flowers were on the bed in front of the evergreens and under the walls, but that was all. Rather a dreary prospect perhaps in winter, for the view was absolutely bounded by the green in the full sunshine of the fine autumn day. Mrs. Woolford loved the sunshine; she had had all the blinds pulled up, and now sat in the window, simply enjoying it. Her embroidery was on a table near her, and a book with a book-marker; but she had walked rather far and was tired, with just that pleasant sense of fatigue which makes rest a luxury; so she sat in the low chair, her hands resting idly in her lap, her eyes turned dreamily to the sunlit grass, a very fair picture. The picture of a beautiful woman, well content.

The door opened, and a young man in morning dress entered. A dark handsome man of about thirty, with an air of easy nonchalance about him, and a very still reserved face. Mrs. Woolford heard the door open, but supposing it to be a servant, did not disturb her reverie or change her position. She sat still, gazing on at the sunlit grass. But finding the steps come towards her, she turned her head to see whom it might be. The room was a large one, and it was when the visitor was about three yards from her. As her eyes fell upon him she rose to her feet and stood there, leaning forward with wonder, while every trace of color fled from her face, and left it of a dull dead white. The man, too, stood still, astonished evidently, but on his face there was no fear.

"Geoffrey!" she gasped, rather than spoke, as soon as the words could be forced from her parched throat; "you here? Geoffrey, you must not stay, you must go."

"Must I, Mary? Why, that is hardly kind after so long an absence;" he came up to her and held out his hand. "Nay, do not look at me as if I were so very horrible a monster; shake hands for old love's sake, won't you, Mary? or, perhaps, I should say, Miss Merton?"

But Mary's hands clasped each other; he let his fall with a slight shrug—he had lived much abroad—and a look of some vexation.

"I am Mrs. Woolford, wife of General Woolford," came painfully from Mary's pale lips. "Now, Geoffrey Hilton, don't you see that however you come to be here, you must go?"

The lips of the man she called Geoffrey smiled, but his eyes were cold and cruel; he was not prepared to have any tenderness for the wife of General Woolford; he answered, however, smoothly.

"Not the least in the world—on the contrary, my sudden departure would not only be inconvenient but would look exceedingly awkward, my fair cousin; since cousin it seems you are. I also have to introduce myself under a new name; you are Mrs. Woolford, I am Mr. Woolford; or, in full, Charles Geoffrey Hilton Woolford—and, if you permit, your most faithful servant and slave." This with a low bow.

She sat back in her chair and moaned softly to herself; the sun shone on, the birds twittered, but for her there was no more sunshine in garden or in life. The ghost of the dead past had risen and stood before her; the one young passionate love of her life, buried at such sore cost, with such bitter pains, had come out of its grave; it looked from his eyes, breathed in his low smooth tones, hung about his every gesture. And yet he had left her, left her with hardly a compunction when his pleasure called him to another place. The pleasant little game of flirtation is much enlivened by an occasional change of partners, and he had had that one nearly long enough.

Yes, after wooing very warmly and seeming to love very tenderly, he had left her without word or sign of warning or farewell. He came no more; he was gone; that was all she knew. Then she had sickened with that terrible sickness of hope deferred; had faded, pined, longed to lie down and die. But she did not. Only hardened and withered inwardly into a cold, quiet, worn woman, to whom love and trust and hope were sounds that had a very hollow ring. After a while she married Captain Green; she liked him well enough, and he adored her; and she and her sister were eating the bread of an