

An October Evening.

The light is dying out as the creeping shadows darken; All day the dreary mists have been clinging to the hills;

You can only hear the gushing of the heavy waters, rushing Underneath the leafless hedges, through the fields that late were gay

You can only hear the sighing of the winds like heralds flying, Bearing into woods and valleys Winters' declaration stern

Or the much despised singing of the cheerful robin, singing His carol of thanksgiving from the chestnut branches bare—

O October! dark and lonely would be thy pathway, only Thou hast two faithful flowers that bloom about thy lingering feet;

And I think their blossoms show us that although dark days come to us, We may do our duty just as well in shadow as in sun;

SELECT STORY.

Invited by Mistake;

MRS. ESTCOURT'S EVENING SOIREE. (CONTINUED.)

Length Mrs. and Miss Gerard were announced, and the heart of Amherst beat violently. But why should I particularize Amherst? The hearts of the whole company beat; for Tyrold, with the charitable intention of plugging the beauties, had signified to them that a guest was expected who would decidedly outshine them all.

Alas! had some evil enchantment been at work upon her, like that which in Don Quixote's opinion had transformed the lady Dulcinea del Toboso into a rustic girl? She was short, without being sylphlike; her complexion was pale, and rather inclining to sallow; her features were irregular; her teeth, although white, were far from even; an animated smile and an intelligent eye might have just preserved her from the imputation of being plain in a party of the usual description, but on this occasion, in the presence of so many beauties, she looked decidedly and undeniably plain, and her unadorned white muslin dress offered a complete contrast to the shining aerial draperies which fluttered around her.

I need not, she said to Mrs. Gerard, in a low voice, introduce Mr. Tyrold to you; he had the pleasure of meeting you and your niece last week, and, I believe, was somewhat smitten with the latter.

Not the niece who now accompanies me, and who is, I am happy to say, my constant inmate, replied Mrs. Gerard. She was confined to the house that day by indisposition; her sister Angelica, whom we consider quite a beauty, was then staying with me; she left me, however, two days afterwards, to join her family in London. She is to be married in a few weeks, and, therefore, I ought not to blame her for paying her sister and myself a very short visit.

Poor Mrs. Gerard! she thought she had made a plain, straightforward speech, and wondered why Tyrold looked mortified, and Mrs. Estcourt looked worried, and Amherst looked confused, and all the company looked much as the audience at the opera house look when an apology is made for the unavoidable

absence of the 'prima donna' through sudden and severe illness. How simple was the solution of the mystery; how natural did it seem that the Miss Gerard now present should have been invited by mistake. It was nobody's fault, yet Mrs. Estcourt felt that it was decidedly her own misfortune. How could she at once acquaint all the fair one's present with this provoking blunder? Would they not suppose that she had violated the rules of her party, and introduced this unquestionably plain girl to cast a burlesque over the whole thing? Nay, might they not imagine that the arrival of the damsel in question heralded that of a score of similar appearance, and that they were to be speedily overwhelmed with an avalanche of dowdies? Here, however, were the unwelcome visitors, and, apparently, they both felt quite at their ease.

Mrs. Gerard, although at first rather startled by finding that she was in the midst of what she demonstrated a 'regular party,' soon settled the matter with herself by deciding that Cheltenham was such a gay place, she supposed these were everyday doings. She was very near sighted, and did not perceive that the ladies were all superior in appearance to the fresh female buds of parties in general; her thoughts, therefore, immediately reverted to the botanical work, and Mrs. Estcourt gladly accompanied her to the room occupied by the chaperons, and furnished her with an ample source of amusement, wishing that she could as easily get rid of the obnoxious niece.

Miss Gerard became more speedily enlightened on the subject; her quick eye made her aware of the remarkable beauty of her fair neighbors, and her quick ear made her mistress of a conversation carried on by some of them in a whisper which convinced her of the circumstances under which she had been invited by mistake. Miss Gerard, however, looked as tranquil and unruffled as Serena, in the Triumphs of Temper, might have done in a similar situation, cast a complacent glance around her with eyes that had not the slightest tinge of envy, and, having sufficiently enjoyed the contemplation, arose to pass into the inner room, thinking that the books on the table there would afford her the means of passing her time more pleasantly than in listening to the rapid and desultory discourse of a very dull set of people.

Amazing sight! Amherst crossed the room to address her! Perhaps his motive was one of unmixed kindness; he might not like the benefactress of his poor pensioners to feel herself neglected, I am afraid, however, that the wish of a little variety had something to do with his action: for, sooth to say, he found the party extremely dull, and had privately whispered to Tyrold that his aunt, in collecting her assemblage of beauties, had unwittingly been dealing with him much as the pastrycooks are said to deal with their apprentices—allowing them such an initiatory profusion of sweets, that they become indifferent to them ever after!

Do not leave us, he said, arresting the steps of Miss Gerard; we are not a very brilliant party, but perhaps we may improve.

Nay, she replied, resuming her seat, I was about to leave you, because, in one sense of the word, you are so very brilliant a party, that I feared I was injuring the general effect by remaining. Perhaps, however, I was wrong; there is great virtue in a decided contrast; jewellers always display their diamonds upon black velvet, and the pretty faces around me are so numerous, that it must be quite refreshing to them to be put in mind of their advantages by gazing on a plain one.

Amherst was literally incapable of replying to her, Queen Emma, walking unhurt over the burning ploughshares, could not have offered a spectacle more surprising to the witnesses of her achievement than did this homely young woman, frankly and cheerfully jesting on her homeliness, do to the astonished Amherst.

You look surprised, she said with a smile; perhaps you expected that I should take refuge in sarcasm or sulkeness; but believe me that I feel rather amused than annoyed. Having been aware of my plainness of person from the days of my childhood, and having borne the misfortune with praiseworthy philosophy, I should no more think of making myself suddenly unhappy on the subject, because accidentally thrown into company with a bevy of beauties, than I should sit down to bewail my want of riches if surrounded by a select detachment of millionaires. I am sorry for Mrs. Estcourt, for I am afraid the Cheltenham paper will dwell as unmercifully upon the solitary drawback to her party as a ruthless critic does on one weak stanza in the course of a clever poem; but, as regards the beauties themselves, I am sure that in their hearts they must consider me far more desirable a visitor than my sister Angelica would have been; she would have rendered them dissatisfied with their

own attractions; I can only increase their feelings of self-satisfaction.

Miss Gerard had a delightful-toned voice, full, clear, sweet, and beautifully modulated. Amherst drew a chair, and sat down by her side.

How correct are your sentiments! he said; and how much am I obliged to you for the frankness with which you express them.

Not at all; I am merely repaying a debt of gratitude to you; your motive could only have been a kind one in coming to sacrifice a part of your evening in talking to a plain person, when you were surrounded by so many handsome ones, and I could not find it in my heart to requite you by a series of 'Yes' and 'No' replies, even with the variations of 'Do you think so?' 'Very true'; and, 'I have often considered so myself!'

And can you really suppose that I feel it a sacrifice of time to converse with you?

Not now, because it is evident that you are entertained by my conversation; but, when you only judged of me by my exterior, your taste could not incline you to cultivate my acquaintance, however your pity might induce you to do so.

Be more charitable to yourself, and to me. I am not conscious of being uncharitable to either.

Yes, you fail in one species of charity however you may excel in another; the bounties of Miss Gerard in her neighborhood are not unknown to me.

The bounties of Miss Gerard are all unworthy of being so publicly chronicled.

Would that she might condescend to indulge me with a private communication of them!

Nay, you would soon grow weary of the annals of the cottage and the village school.

Not when related by one who—

Pray pardon me for want of courtesy in interrupting you, but I am anxious to save you from a still greater lapse of courtesy; a young lady is preparing to sing.

Amherst was silent, and the song was begun and finished.

Let me prevail on you to favour us replied Amherst to Miss Gerard, with the slightest possible tinge or patronage in his manner; you need not be discouraged by the style of the lady who has just quitted the piano.

Assuredly not, she replied, with a smile; her style is very defective; she has evidently not, like myself, had the advantage of a good master.

And you also possess, said Amherst, that advantage which is defined to constitute two-thirds of the requisites for a singer; I am much deceived in your view in speaking, if your tones are not delightful in singing.

I suppose I ought, in accordance with the established rule, to say that I have no voice, and that I have a severe cold, and that I am quite out of practice; but, as I could not say any of these things with truth, I am not disposed to say them at all.

Then you will oblige us? Willingly; as I cannot be ornamental to Mrs. Estcourt's party, the least I can do is to make myself useful.

Amherst led Miss Gerard to the piano thinking, at the same time, that clever animated, and entertaining as she was, she certainly seemed the least in the world vain of her musical abilities. The young lady who had preceded her, and who, on account of her profusion of sunny ringlets, was generally known by the name of the fair one with the golden locks, had played and sung as fair ones with golden locks are very much in the habit of doing. She had played the symphony of her song with a feeble, confused touch, and when she had got to the end had played it all over again meaning to perform much better, but in reality performing somewhat worse.

She had begun her strain in a very faint, quivering tone; as she progressed her voice had grown loud, but proportionally husky; when she came near the end of the air, she precipitated the time in her anxiety to get her task over; and she concluded with a cadence pencilled for her by her master, which put every one in mind of a slovenly shuffle at cards, and which she crowned with an imperfect, ill-sustained shake. As she had played the symphony twice over at the beginning, she made matters even by merely striking a chord (which was a false one) at the end of her song smiled around on her auditors as if waiting for three rounds of applause, and when told that the song was charming, and that she had sung it divinely, meekly responded,—

Do you think so?

A different sort of exhibition awaited the party. Miss Gerard, after a brilliant and scientific prelude, began to sing a well-known popular song; her splendid and exquisitely managed voice rather resembled the clear, ringing tones of professional excellence, than the low languid murmuring of amateur performance. She displayed neither confidence nor confidence; it was evident that the language of song was as that of speech

to her, and she was completely careless as to the effect she produced upon her auditory, knowing beforehand what it was certain to be. Few people are accurate judges of either music or painting but the brilliant singer and the exquisite artist find their way at once to the hearts and taste of the multitude.

Of Miss Gerard's singing there could not be two opinions; a child would admire it for its sweetness, and a professor for its science. The room was hushed in silence, and even a few of the chaperons came in from the adjoining apartment to add their tribute of wonder to that of the rest of the party. Miss Gerard carelessly struck chords on the piano, which showed her perfect familiarity with thorough bass, while the burst of applause that greeted her song continued, till, on hearing the fair one with the golden locks whisper to a friend that she thought very little of singing, and that it was far more desirable to excel in instrumental performance, she immediately struck into a wild, extempore piece of music. Mrs. Anderson could scarcely have made the instrument speak more intelligibly; she absolutely electrified the prim cabinet piano, which had never reverberated to such a touch before. She then rose to quit her seat, but Amherst, almost passionately entreating for one more song, induced her to resume it and with exquisite pathos she sang words of high poetic beauty which were unknown to Amherst, adapted to an old Scotch melody which was well known to him.

Now then, she said to Amherst, I must hope you will not ask me to sing again, for I do not wish you to subject yourself to the mortification of a refusal.

And why refuse me, Miss Gerard? Are you tired yourself, or do you think that your hearers are tired of listening to you?

Neither; but I have engrossed the attention of the company quite as long as an individual ought to do; a good voice always draws a great deal of notice on its possessor. You observe those two respectable elderly ladies, in purple satin dresses and bird-of-paradise plumes in their hats; had I sang in a commonplace manner, they would not have deigned to recognize my existence, and now I can see, by the complacency in which they eye me, and the confidential whispers that they are exchanging with one another, that they are each intent on securing me for a party, and are anxious that their evenings should not clash. I shall, however, be hard-hearted enough to disappoint them both.

I came into the country in quest of quiet, not of parties, and certainly never should have come to this, had I been aware that it was otherwise than the meeting of a few friends. Amherst began a speech with 'Oh! Miss Gerard,' which was doubtless intended to be very pathetic, but his flowers of eloquence were nipped in the bud by the approach of Mrs. Estcourt, followed by the matrons in the bird-of-paradise plumes, whom she introduced to Miss Gerard; and that young lady proved herself deserving of the name of a sibyl as well as of a syren, for in a few minutes one of them hoped she was disengaged on the ensuing Monday, and the other professed the most ardent desire to introduce her to a distinguished amateur on the Wednesday following.

Miss Gerard courteously but firmly declined both these invitations, and while satisfying the ladies as to who had been her master, whose music she preferred, and who was her favourite singer, Amherst entered into conversation with Mrs. Gerard who had been allured from her work on botany by the sweet tones of her niece.

Can you inform me, he asked, of the author of the beautiful lines which Miss Gerard sang adapted to an old Scotch melody.

Undoubtedly, said Mrs. Gerard, with a smile; the verses were written by herself; she has a valuable taste for poetry.

Nature has been very bountiful to her, said Amherst.

Very much so, answered Mrs. Gerard in every respect but that of personal attraction. My niece Angelica, who has just been staying with me, has engrossed all the beauty of the family, but she has not a single accomplishment; her masters gave her up in despair, and in mind she is just raised above absolute silliness. Her intended, Sir William Halbrook, is passionately attached to her, but I think he will find, in a few months after wedlock, that marrying a girl without half-a-dozen ideas, on account of her beautiful face, is something like taking a residence in a dull and unfrequented part of the country for the sake of its beautiful prospect; the eye is soon tired of gazing, and the mind requires to be amused in its turn.

Miss Gerard at this moment joined them; Amherst immediately informed her of his discovery of the authorship of the exquisite verses she had sung, and in a few minutes they were deep in discussion on the merits of Campbell, Wordsworth, and Coleridge. Mrs. Estcourt petitioned many of her fair visitors

for music, but none chose to exhibit after Miss Gerard.

We must contrive to get up quadrilles she whispered to Tyrold; things are going on flatter than ever; mine will be the most stupid party of the season.

Accordingly quadrilles were got up; there was no beauty quadrille, because all the lady dancers were beautiful with the exception of one who looked among them much as a cheap plaster image might be supposed to do if it found its way into the sculpture-room of the Royal Academy; yet to that individual did Amherst offer his hand, and led her forth to dance, to the now small anger and displeasure of the fair one with the golden locks, and many others of the guests. Miss Gerard danced in a quiet and ladylike manner, but nothing more; she declined joining the quadrilles a second time, and Amherst also retired from the dancers, and resumed his conversation with her on the poets.

It was the first rational conversation in which he had ever indulged with a young lady; hitherto he had only breathed to them the language of complimentary adulation, concluding that all else would be unwelcome to them; but now he was greatly surprised to find that even his clever friend Tyrold could not quote from the poets, or discuss their beauties, so fluently as the still more clever Miss Gerard. They arrived at length at Alfred Tennyson, and had completely forgotten the gay scene around them while dwelling on the exquisite images of solitude, dulness and deprivation, contained in 'Mariana in the Moated Grange,' when Mrs. Gerard, who was growing almost as weary as Mariana herself, although from a different cause, approached her niece to deliver her opinion that it was not right to keep even a hired horse waiting two hours after the time at which it was ordered to attend.

The whole party now broke up, and Amherst, after escorting the last beauty to her carriage, just looked into the drawing-room to bid his aunt good-night on his way to his chamber, not being able to summon resolution to undergo the lecture which he feared was in store for him respecting his conduct during the whole of the evening. Tyrold was more courageous; he purposely stayed behind, that he might express to Mrs. Estcourt his sorrow at having been the innocent cause of leading her into so untoward a mistake. He began to address his hostess with a most penitential face when he was startled by seeing her whole countenance radiant with joy, and feeling his hand cordially grasped.

How can I thank you enough? she exclaimed; you are the cause of it all; my nephew will certainly marry this Miss Gerard whom I invited by mistake.

But, stammered the contrite Tyrold! she is not a beauty.

She is all the better for it, replied the vivacious lady; you know I have always had a particular dislike to beauties, and I think this evening I have disliked them more than ever.

The fact was, that Mrs. Estcourt had caught divers glimpses of her own figure, and of those of her fair visitors, in one or other of her great looking-glasses during the course of the evening, and did not feel at all pleased by the contrast of their appearance to hers. I perceive how it is, said Tyrold, brightening up; you invited a party of beauties because you believed that Amherst would choose no other for a wife, but, in reality, you would prefer Miss Gerard for a niece to any other of your guests.

[CONCLUDED IN OUR NEXT.]

I'll take the responsibility, as a deoting father said when he held out his arms for the baby.

Somebody advertises for "a good girl to cook." We have seen some that almost looked good enough to eat raw.

THE STAR.

AND CONCEPTION BAY SEMI-WEEKLY ADVERTISER.

Is printed and published by the Proprietors, ALEXANDER A. PARSONS and WILLIAM R. SQUIRE, at their Office, opposite the premises of Capt. D. Green, Water Street, Harbor Grace, Newfoundland.

Book and Job Printing executed in a manner calculated to afford the utmost satisfaction.

Price of Subscription—THREE DOLLARS per annum, payable half-yearly. Advertisements inserted on the most liberal terms, viz.—Per square of seven lines, for first insertion, \$1; each continuation 25 cents.

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