

MY ONLY LOVE.

BY FREDERICK LOCKER.

My only love is always near,—
In country or in town
I see her twinkling feet, I hear
The whisper of her gown.

She foots it ever fair and young,
Her locks are tied in haste,
And one is o'er her shoulder flung,
And hangs below her waist.

She ran before me in the meads;
And down this world-worn track
She leads me on; but while she leads,
She never gazes back.

And yet her voice is in my dreams,
To witch me more and more;
That wooing voice! Ah me it seems
Less near me than of yore.

Lightly I sped when hope was high,
And youth beguiled the chase,—
I follow, follow still; but I
Shall never see her face!

THE MAJOR'S LUNCHEON.

AN OVER TRUE TALE.

It was a bright sunny day in July, and although people seemed to find it hot, yet to me the atmosphere had only just the chill off, for I was lately home from a lengthened sojourn in Bombay. I had been to the India Office to see one of the officials on a little matter of detail connected with my furlough, and I had two or three hours to spare before my train—I live at Sevenoaks, and had a return ticket by the London, Chatham, and Dover—was due to start, and I didn't exactly know how to employ the time. I strolled across the Parade, ascended the steps by the Duke of York's Column, stood and stared at the statue they have just put up of Outram; horse standing on three legs, and Outram looking back, leaning on the flank of his horse. Well, I hadn't much fault to find with the statue, except, perhaps, as to the horse being a little heavy, and that I'd have made him splashing out with his near fore leg, seeing that his rider's leaning over the off flank; but, notwithstanding, it's a spirited thing, and that's a good deal to say in these days. When I'd had a good look at Outram I turned into Pall-mall, and took a long stare at the print-shops, and then I sauntered along the Opera colonnade, a fragrant whiff of some cooking going on at the restaurant there making me all of a sudden feel as if I was hungry.

Perhaps you will say that I was in the right quarter to be satisfied; but I didn't feel so. I am, like John Gilpin, of a frugal mind. I haven't toiled all these years in a foreign land under a blazing sun to dissipate my modest hoard on cooks and restaurateurs; moreover, my appetite is a masculine one, and is not to be appeased by cutlets as big as half-crowns. Should I take the "bus" to Paddington, and lunch with my sister Emily? Paddington is a long way, Emily as likely as not would be out, and if at home she would probably be lunching off cream-cheese and Osborne biscuits, and a glass of Gladstonian claret. Should I retreat to my station, and refresh myself calmly at the dining-room there and await my train? There was something ignominious in the idea. Here was I in one of the most wonderful cities in the world, and all I could find it in my heart to do was to get out of it as quickly as possible.

Irresolute I stood at the corner of the Haymarket, not having made up my mind which way to go. I hadn't stood there a second before an old Irishwoman asked me the way to Bethnal-green. I was rather flurried at this, as, although I have a good general idea of the direction of Bethnal-green, I found it difficult to methodise it with sufficient rapidity for the old Irishwoman, who gave me a glance of contempt and passed on. Before I had recovered from this, two very nice-looking girls, moved, I suppose, by my fatherly appearance, besought me, with charming smiles, to direct them to the Academy. Now in my young days the Academy used to be at the National Gallery, and although I ought to have known very well that it was now at Burlington House, yet I had somehow never realised the fact, and so I sent off these two very nice young creatures entirely in the wrong direction. My heart smote me the next moment, and I was about to rush across the street to stop them and put them in the right way when I was seized by a florid young Irishman, with all the superfluous energy and fluency of his country, who insisted on my directing him to the Chief Commissioner of the Civil Service, and was very angry with me when I assured him that there was no such functionary. He insisted on producing an official envelope addressed to Michael O'Donovan, Esq., at some howling wilderness in Tipperary, which certainly bore in the corner the words, "Civil Service Commissions."

"And would there be a Commission without a Commissioner?" cried Michael triumphantly but scornfully; and then I saw what he wanted of course, and sent him off to Dean's yard; but I didn't know, after all, whether he wouldn't have committed an assault upon me with the idea he'd got that I was "desaving" him. I

hope to goodness the Civil Service Commission hasn't moved too, or I shall fear to find my tall Irish friend waiting for me at the corner of the Haymarket with a big stick next time I pass.

But next minute I was paid for all, when such a sweet voice fell upon my ear, and a lady with a little boy in her hand asked me the way to Regent-street. She had one of those softly-moulded sympathetic faces that give one a heart-ache when one finds that the owners of them are married, not with any idea of selfish appropriation, but with the thought that such sweet candid creatures should be set apart for the love and adoration of all mankind, and not monopolised by some one unworthy wretch. She asked me the way to Regent-street, and happy was I that I knew it. After that I deserted my post and darted across to the other side.

I hadn't got more than half a dozen yards when I felt a hand laid upon my arm, and saw at my side a very good looking, well-dressed man.

"My dear fellow," he said, "how are you?" I didn't know but what I knew the man, for one meets so many people of his kidney; and, for aught I could tell, I might have been hospitably entertained by him somewhere or other up the country, so that I didn't like to confess my ignorance of his name and quality. And we walked very cordially together towards St. Martin's Church.

"When was the last time we met?" said my new friend. "Surely at the Governor-General's ball at Calcutta."

"Never was at Calcutta in my life," I said; "mine's the Bombay Presidency."

"And I've been taking you all this time for Colonel Scoop. Is it possible that I'm deceived?" I always feel, with the least degree of soreness when in England, that my friends in the military branch have somewhat the pull over us civilians in matter of titles; but in India "collector" is a very much more important title than colonel, but people don't seem to understand that, and set us on a level with the tax-gatherer. Thus it was with a slight degree of acerbity I replied that I was no colonel at all, but a mere civil servant.

"Most wonderful!" cried my friend. "Never was such an extraordinary resemblance. Pardon the unconscious liberty I've taken."

Well, we were very polite to one another, and asked after this man and the other, whom, perhaps, we might both know, and got quite thick together. Major Bilkins, it appeared, was the man's name; he was a nice, agreeable fellow, and we walked on together in a very amicable way. Bilkins hoped I'd come and look him up at his little place in Surrey, and I gave him my card and said I'd be glad to see him at Sevenoaks.

"And what are you going to do now?" said the Major. "Come and lunch with me at the Oriental."

Now, there are six or seven men to whom I've a deadly hatred who lunch at the Oriental daily, besides which one gets quite enough of the Orient in India, and so I told him.

"Quite right," he said; "I like to get out of the regular groove. What do you say to going into the City and having a bit of fish together? I know a capital place, Chuffin's, close to Billingsgate, and handy for our trains. Take the penny boat from Hungerford, eh?"

I willingly agreed to this, for I like to make the acquaintance of new phases of life under competent guidance, although I haven't enterprise enough to cut out anything of the kind for myself.

The tide was well up, and we had a pleasant sail down the river. There is no more charming vista than that from Hungerford-bridge. The Embankment makes a handsome sweep just there, and the bridge of Waterloo, surely the handsomest bridge in England, and Somerset House, and St. Paul's looming over all; but lower down the Embankment gives a sadly tame and formal aspect to the river. A stone wall, accented with lamp-posts and door-knockers, is an unworthy monument of British taste. You might have taken a hint from the Hindoo ghauts, or landing-places, to advantage.

We landed close to London-bridge, and the Major introduced me to Chuffin's. A very nice place, with an ordinary and a regular chairman, and characters that I were one of your pen-and-ink artists, I should have great pleasure in sketching for you. We had no end of fish of the very best. But the Major seduced me into extravagance. A pint of champagne with our fish, some brown sherry, and, to wind up, some capital foed punch, an iniquitous sort of proceeding for a man who had a family dinner awaiting him at seven; but I got into the spirit of the thing somehow, and the Major's conversation was really quite bright and entralling.

"I must leave you now," said the Major, calling the waiter and picking out a ninepenny cigar. He took a handful of change out of his pocket. "You'll allow me to settle for this little affair?"

"Couldn't think of it," I said warmly; "not on any account."

"O, nonsense! Well, I won't press it," he said, seeing I was determined. "Let's see, two-and-six, five, seven-and-six, and six for the waiter, eight shillings a-piece; 'shall I settle?'"

"Do, if you please," I said, handing my friend half a sovereign.

The Major gave me a two-shilling piece and lounged away to the little desk, where they took the money, made his financial arrangements, and vanished with a parting wave of the hand.

For myself I confess that I felt a little mud-

died with the good things of which I had partaken. I ordered a brandy-and-soda and screw of tobacco, and indulged in a long clay pipe—a thing I very much affect when I have a chance.

Presently, as the time for my train approached, I knocked out the ashes of my pipe and made my way to the door."

"I have to pay for a brandy-and-soda and tobacco," I said.

"Yes, sir," said the waiter, who hovered about to check off the payers, "and two dinners, champagne, sherry, punch—eighteen shillings, if you please, sir."

"But," I remonstrated, "my friend paid for all that."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the young woman at the desk; "he left word, sir, that you would settle for everything."

Well, they wouldn't let me go without paying, and I went home rather crestfallen. I wrote to Major Bilkins, at Bickley Park, Surrey, but my letter came back in due course marked in red and other colored inks all over it, "Not known; try—" ever so many places.

O, Major Bilkins, I didn't mind so much paying for you feed and giving you a little pocket-money, but it was rather too bad to hand me for change out of my half-sovereign a florin that proved to be a "duffer."

Why two Christmases came in one year.

"Kriss! Kriss!" called Mrs. Santa Claus, as she went out of the house and across the yard. "Now I do wonder where that boy is," she added, looking behind the iceberg that stood like a great frosted hay-rick just in front of the stable door. Kriss was very fond of playing there with his little white bear; but neither boy nor bear was now to be seen. She then peeped into the stable, and saw the reindeer in their stalls, but no Kriss was there. "Well," she thought, as she turned back, "he can't be far away, and the smell of supper will certainly bring him home." Just as she was going in the door she saw the bear trotting clumsily but quickly off toward the north pole, which is in sight of the house. She went in then, quite easy, for she knew the boy must be somewhere near; and cutting two fine, juicy seal-steaks off the seal in the pantry, she freshened up her fire, and prepared to cook supper. Mrs. Santa Claus never permitted her family to become hungry. They always had four meals a day; but Kriss, who was growing, and needed more food, had his two lunches besides. It certainly was a great pity that neither Sir John Franklin nor Dr. Kane ever happened upon Santa Claus when they explored the polar region. He is much more hospitable than the Esquimaux, and would have been glad to have entertained and helped them. His visiting circle is so very small that to see a stranger is quite an event, and there would have been no limit to the kindness he would have shown them. "Mrs. Santa Claus goes out still less than her husband; so, although she is obliged to have several new dresses every year, she is never worried by any change in the fashion. In fact, she cuts the clothes for the whole family just alike. When Santa Claus brings home the skins from his grand hunts, she sorts them into three piles. The largest is for Santa Claus, the next for herself, and the little one for Kriss. When the three are together, they are a comical-looking family, for except in size, there is no difference in them. Another odd thing about them is, that they have but the one name in common. This became very confusing after the child became old enough to run about, as old Santa Claus would often answer the mother's call for the boy, perhaps leaving a toy half finished, and the glue cooling. He finally decided that it would be best to nickname the young Santa, and call him "Kriss Kringle"—a title he himself is known by among the Pennsylvania Dutch. After this there was no farther trouble about names.

But to come back to Kriss upon this particular evening. He was by no means even as far away as his mother had thought, for he had not only seen her, but also had heard her speak. But if she had known where he was, he would have made a quick march out. Over the stable there was a large room, neatly fitted up with shelves and boxes, where Santa Claus kept all his finished toys. Kriss was never allowed to go there without his father; but here he was now, busy as he could be. He was not, as you may perhaps think, playing with the toys, for he did not care for them now; he had had so many, and knew all the secrets about them. He had even helped his father put the squeak into the dogs and pigs, and knew just how the strings must be put into harlequins if they were to jump properly, and how the jugglers and magic lanterns were made, and so was tired of them all. He had just now, however, handled them very extensively, and was still engaged in the same occupation. He had taken out his father's great leather bags, and was busy filling them up with anything that came nearest to hand. As every thing in the room was finished in good style for Christmas, he had, in spite of his lack of choice, made a pretty collection. His idea in doing this can be very simply explained. It was now near Christmas-time, and there was much excitement and business in the Santa Claus domicile. Santa Claus was hurried with some extra vanishing; and between dressing dolls, making candy and candy bags, and seeing

that the Noah's arks and the menageries were all properly assorted, Mrs. Santa Claus never went to bed until after twelve o'clock. Little Kriss was, however, a looker-on in this excitement. His parents thought him too little to work, and he did not care to play. Still he wanted a share in the bustle; and the night before, as he lay in his little trundle-bed watching his mother tie sashes upon a whole row of dolls—for she had the latest fashions for them, if not for herself—a bright idea occurred to him. What he wanted to do was to go with his father Christmas-eve to carry the presents to the children; but he knew this would not be permitted. The year before he had accomplished it, for he hid himself among the bags and buffalo-ropes in the sledge, and his father never found him until they reached Vermont, and then it was too late to turn back. But there was no hope for him this Christmas, for he knew the sledge would be well searched before his father started. Still he did not despair; and as he lay in his bed this night it flashed across his mind that he might take the deer and sleigh some night before the Christmas and have a little trip of his own. He was now acting upon this idea; and so, when he had finished packing the bags, and preparing every thing necessary, he smelled the seal-steaks cooking, and, coming out of the stable, went into the house.

His mother was now busy making a walrus hash—for they always had two dishes of meat on the table—and only glanced up to see that he was all safe and right. Soon supper was ready, and the father called in; but although Kriss had but little appetite, he managed, between what he ate and what he stealthily put in his pocket for a midnight lunch, to satisfy his mother. After supper was over his father delighted him by saying that the work was now so nearly done that he thought they might all go to bed early and take a good night's rest. Mrs. Claus rubbed her eyes, and said she would be very glad to do so; and Kriss hypocritically rubbed his also, but truthfully remarked that the sooner they all went to bed the better he would like it.

It was, however, ten o'clock before they were all in bed, and almost eleven before Kriss thought it safe to start. He had some trouble, too, with the deer! For Vixen, the off-deer, would not let him harness her for some time, and then, just as he was ready to start, he found that Dancer's harness was too tight. However, after some work he made every thing ready, lugged down the bags; packed them safely with the tops up, buttoned up his little seal-skin overcoat, drew on his fur gloves, and was off. He drove directly southeast for a time, then turned south, and passed close by the shore of Hudson Bay, and crossed the St. Lawrence and stopped in Troy, New York. Here he selected a house with a good wide chimney, took out a wax doll, a curly dog, and a candy tiger, and jumped out of the sleigh. It occurred to him at that moment that perhaps there were no children in that house. His father always knew, but how he knew Kriss could not think. Suddenly he remembered that his mother had said that there was warmth in the house where children dwelt; so he laid down the toys, took off his glove, and felt the roof, but it was icy cold. He then jumped into the sledge and drove on, stopping on several roofs to try them, but they were all cold. This, it was plain, was not the way to find out. He then thought he would go down the chimneys and look for the children. At the next house he accordingly left his toys in the sledge, jumped out, sprang down the chimney, and found himself in a large room, where a little baby lay asleep in a crib, and her mother near her in a big bed. He then went back, and getting the toys, laid them beside her. But he found that going on such exploring expeditions first was rather tedious work. His father always strapped a bag on his back, as every one knows, but they were all too big for Kriss to carry, so he filled his pockets with little things, stuck as many as possible in his belt, strung some around his neck, and so dressed up, jumped down many and many a chimney.

He was just going to step into his sledge, after many hours of busy work, when he happened to glance up at the sky, and saw that it was nearly day. He had intended going farther, but now had no time. He took out all his toys—but they were almost all gone—placed what he had on a good straight roof, close to the chimney, whipped up his deer, and galloped home. He had expected to have reached home before his parents had awakened, but although he took a short-cut home, he saw the smoke curling up through the keen morning air before he saw the house, and so knew that his mother certainly was up. He managed to drive quietly into the stable, and had just unharnessed the deer, and was about to give them some moss, when a shadow darkened the door; he looked up, and there stood his father! Kriss did not feel very comfortable, but his only course was plain; he followed the never-forgotten example of George Washington under somewhat similar circumstances, and owned up. The only reply Santa Claus made was to tell him to come into the house and get his breakfast. After the meal was over they all sat down around the fire, and little Kriss had to give a full account of his adventures. After he had finished his story, to which his parents listened in perfect gravity, they sent him out to feed the tame bears and walrus, while they talked the subject over. Mrs. Claus sat on one side of the fire-place, Santa Claus on the other. They were silent for a moment; then he looked at her, she looked back at him, and then they both laughed. It certainly was very funny to them, but it would not do to let him go unpunished, or he would