

LITERARY.

For Better, For Worse.

Upon the terrace at the principal hotel at Whitecliff, two ladies sat in conversation, unheeding, because unaware of a listener behind the closed blinds of a window near them. Not an intentional listener, for he was deeply absorbed in a newly-arrived letter, when the sound of his own name attracted his attention. One of the pretty young matrons was speaking, and said:

"I can't imagine how such a sparkling, brilliant woman as Mrs. Lancaster ever came to marry that solemn piece of granite, Edward Lancaster."

"Solemn piece of granite! One of our most profound scholars, Edith. A thorough gentleman, too, and very wealthy."

"Wealthy!" repeated the first speaker. "I suppose that accounts for it. She married him for his money, of course."

"And spends it royally. I can't imagine Edith Lancaster without the surroundings of money. Her dresses, her jewels, her carriage seem a very part of her."

"But she would be beautiful in a print dress and straw hat."

"Here she comes now in her new yachting dress. Is she not lovely?"

The dark eyes behind the closed blinds followed the same direction as those of the two ladies. Coming towards the hotel was a merry party, who had been on the water several hours, and prominent in the group of pretty women, was a tall, slender brunette, in a jaunty dress of blue cashmere with gilt buttons and a broad hat, from underneath which could be seen a face of exquisite beauty. The perfect oval shape, the clear, olive complexion and crimson cheeks, the regular features and large dark eyes, were all in Oriental style; while the masses of purple black hair needed no artificial additions to wreath the small, shapely head with heavy braids.

She was chatting merrily, and laughing, as she talked, as if youth and happiness were personified in her beautiful face.

The man who watched her from the closed blinds was tall, broad-shouldered and strong-featured. His hair, thick and curling, was iron-grey, and piled high above his massive forehead; his eyes were deep-set, but very large and full of earnest expression. Not a handsome man, but one whose air of distinction was undoubted—a man who could be noticed in any assembly of men.

As he watched the radiant figure in the sunlight, coming towards him, the shadow on his brow grew deeper every moment till, with a groan, he arose and went to his own room, closing the door behind him.

There was little resemblance to granite in his face as he paced up and down his room. It worked convulsively, and the emotions that in a woman would have been vented in passionate tears found expression only in an occasional sigh that was a groan.

He was living over the last three years of his life, as he walked up and down. Until that time he had been a scholar only. With large wealth inherited from his father, he had devoted himself to the acquisition of knowledge, living in his library, except when he traveled, always in pursuit of some light upon a favorite science or study. His money matters were arranged by a lawyer, and his household affairs by a house-keeper, while books were his world.

From this scholarly seclusion, at the

age of forty-five, he was awakened by a call of friendship, being summoned by an old schoolmate who besought him to become guardian to a very moderate fortune he was about to leave to his only child. Obeying this summons, Edward Lancaster found his friend already dead, and the orphan turning to him for consolation. He took her home, gave her to Mrs. Keene, his house-keeper, as he would do with a baby, for care and comfort, and retired again to his study.

Between his eyes and the pages of his book came over the face of the orphan girl. He found himself sitting idly before his papers listening to the sound of a musical voice in the passage or garden. He neglected his studies, to count the hours between meals, when he met his ward at the table. Never before had a woman's face or voice awakened even a passing emotion in Edward Lancaster's heart, and interest once aroused, love crept in and took root, strong, life-long. There was no possibility of driving away this love once it was admitted. Edward Lancaster knew that Edith must be won, even if he was ever to know happiness in life again. If he lost her, he would live, bury himself in his books once more; but never again could the same peace he had known be found.

When he told the child (she was but seventeen) he loved her, she nestled in his arms, lifted her sweet face to his and promised to be his wife. He never doubted her love, strange as it seemed, and they were married within six months of Edith's arrival at her new home.

Once she was his own, Edward Lancaster made his wife a perfect favorite of fortune. He left his dearly-beloved library to escort her to gay watering-places in summer, to New York in winter. He never counted the cost of any indulgence she craved. Her dress was of the costliest description; her jewels were the envy of her circle of friends, and she had but to name a wish to have it gratified. She was of the sunniest temperament, child-like in her gratitude, and sitting from pleasure to pleasure as a bird flies from fruits to flowers.

Life had been very sweet to Edward Lancaster in the three years following his marriage, though many wondered, seeing the grave, elderly man, how he came to marry his child-wife.

But as he paced his room in the Whitecliff Hotel, Edward Lancaster questioned his happiness as he had never questioned it before. The letter he held fast in his clenched hand, the conversation upon the porch, combined to probe his heart to the core, and the question hidden there rose to the surface.

Did Edith love him?

She had always been gay, affectionate, deferring to his wishes, more like a child with an indulgent father than a wife; for, as yet, but little of wifely duty had been exacted of her. Of household care she had none. Her life had been passed in perpetual pleasure, seeking, with no call for sacrifice.

But the letter, the fateful letter, told the tender husband that the wealth he had held so carelessly for years was gone in one great commercial crash; one hour a man of riches; the next a pauper. It was all gone, the lawyer wrote, and the sale of Elmgrove, his home, would scarcely cover the liabilities incurred in the past three years.

Had she married him for money? The thorn, once planted, stung him sorely. He was not a vain man, but he had thought that his love, so devoted, so true, had won a return. Money had been to him all his life so small a consideration, except to be

glad that it was to give Edith every indulgence. And now, the hateful thought rose and pressed him sorely that Edith had married him for what he had lost and could give her no longer.

A rattling at the door handle, a voice calling his name roused him from his moody misery, and he drew back the bolt to admit Edith.

"Just time to dress for dinner!" she cried, coming in. "I staid down stairs till the last minute. Shall I ring for Mary, Edward, or—" she looked in her husband's face—"Edward, what is the matter?"

An impulse, a cruel one, prompted him to test her then and there, and he put his lawyer's letter in her hand. In a moment, before she had smoothed the crumpled sheet, he repented, and drew near her to catch her if she fainted, to console her if she wept. She read it all. The light of merriment in her face softened to a sweet, earnest gravity, and some of the rich color faded from her cheeks. Her voice was very tender as she said "I am so sorry for you, Edward. You will miss your library, your books. Perhaps we can save some of them for you."

"But you Edith?" he said, amazed.

"I? Mr. Morrell tells you especially that my property is safe. Five hundred a year," she said with a silvery laugh. "How little it is compared with what you had; but I have seen a time before when five hundred a year seemed positive wealth."

"But Edith, child, you do not understand. I have lost everything. I can no longer give you diamonds, laces, velvets. I cannot carry you from place to place, wherever the whim sends us. I—I can give you nothing."

His face was ashen white, and his eyes rested upon his wife with a piteous, imploring look, as if entreating her pardon for some wrong. She put her arms about him and drew him beside her upon the sofa. Then she rested her head upon his broad shoulder, and put her hand in his before she spoke.

"Edward, my husband," she said gently. "Do not grieve for me. I never owned jewels till you gave them to me. I was brought up in a school of comparative poverty. The income my father left me was gathered together at a cost of privation and hardship I can never describe to you. When my father died you came. I was never in a house as beautiful as Elmgrove. I never had anyone to speak so kindly as you spoke. My father had given me an education, and my teachers were fond of me; but he seldom spoke to me. I was a desolate child."

"Edith! Edith!" her husband said tenderly.

"Then you took me home. You spoke to me gently, you cared to have me near you. You"—Edith's tears were falling fast—"you loved me. You, so good, so noble, so rich, stooped down to love poor little me. Edward nobody ever loved me in all my life but you. You gave me every wish of my heart; but all the pleasures, all the indulgences, were nothing beside your love."

Edward Lancaster was too much moved to speak. Never before had Edith torn the veil from her heart as she was doing now, and the certainty he was rapidly gaining that she had given love for love was a happiness too overpowering to find vent in words.

"And you," Edith said, softly, "there was always one wish ungratified. Do not think I undervalue all the sacrifices you have made for me.

I appreciate the care for me that has made you leave your home, your books, to take me about in the gay world. I saw that it made you happy to have me dress handsomely, to have me invited into society and enjoy its pleasure. But in all of these three years I have scarcely seen you. I have craved a home where we could be all in all to each other; where no claim of the gay world should come between us. Not a grand home, with servants to perform every task, but a home your wife could beautify with her own hands. Now we will find one, my husband. I am longing to show how nicely I can cook; how daintily I can clean a room. While you read I will work; and in the evening we will sit together in our tiny sitting-room, and be far happier than we are in these crowded hotels. And, Edward, if we are very saving we can buy back your books. There are all my jewels; surely they will buy some?"

"Edith, stop. My own happiness bewilders me. You love me like that? You will be happy in a poor home, cooking and working for me?"

Edith lifted her shining, dark eyes to the noble face bending over her, and drew down her husband's head till her lips touched his.

"I love you—I love you!" she whispered. "Love will make all labor light if it is for you!"

There was consternation in the gay circle of Edith's friends, when, the next day, she was missed from among them. Speculations were wild regarding the sudden disappearance of the brilliant star of society, and many were the pitying words lavished upon her when Edward Lancaster's losses were known.

But the little wife neither knew of the pity nor asked sympathy. Her husband accepted a professorship in a college, and a little house was taken and furnished for the home Edith craved.

The beauty that had made Edith a star in the most brilliant circles of society lost nothing in her husband's eyes when it was the home-light after days of college work. In her quiet dresses, without glittering gems, Edith was as lovely as she had ever been in her costly ball or dinner toilets; and the little hands that could rest idly in luxury, glitter with valuable rings, and flash over the piano keys, were busy from dawn to sunset in the housework that women find ever awaiting them.

Edward Lancaster was never very poor, and Edith never knew again the wants and cares of her girlhood; but the wealth that was lost was not restored, and never regretted. By its loss he had learned his wife's heart; deprived of that, he found the treasure of happy domestic life, and in his new duties he found the pleasure of making the knowledge he loved useful to others.

The professor had been two years in his new home, when, one evening from the college, he found Edith sewing busily upon a cloak for a year old boy crouching in the cradle.

"My yatching dress, Edward."

"I remember it," Edward answered gravely.

"Do you? I never wore it but once—the last day we were at Whitecliff."

"The day," her husband answered, "when after an hour of doubting agony, I found my wife had married me with the true love—for better, for worse."

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