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PHILIP ARKWRIGHT'S WAGER.

A TALE OF THE TIMES.

BY GARDE.

CHAPTER I.

MANY of the readers of the SATURDAY READER know more about King street, Toronto, than I can tell them. It is a very respectable street, and presents, to-day, I have no doubt, a striking contrast to the time—not so very far distant—when it was the principal thoroughfare of muddy Little York—innocent of the civilizing influences of MacAdam, and smacking strongly of corduroy. As I am not, however, a learned antiquarian, my purpose is to deal rather with the present than the past aspect of the favourite promenade of the western metropolis.

From four o'clock to six, the beauty and aristocracy of Toronto are wont to sun themselves in King street. Groups of well-dressed women saunter leisurely along, bent on shopping excursions, or modestly courting the admiration of the sterner sex; and it is due to the graceful forms and fair faces of the Toronto ladies to add, that the desired admiration is liberally bestowed. A man must be a veritable cynic to pass unscathed through the batteries of bright eyes he is sure to encounter on King street during the fashionable hours.

"Phil, do you know that young lady approaching us, in the stylish velvet mantle?"

"I haven't the honour."

"Then let me tell you I am sorry for you; she is acknowledged to be the belle of Toronto, and is every way worthy of being the wife of a millionaire."

"Haw! indeed!—introduce me, Harry!"

"Willingly, my Croesus, on the first favourable opportunity. I warn you, however, that you must not expect to walk over the course—for you will meet with plenty of rivals, if you enter the lists for *la belle Alice*."

The Croesus replied with a careless shrug, which intimated, as plainly as shrug could do, Phillip Arkwright's belief that he and his wealth were alike irresistible.

By this time they had neared the lady of the velvet mantle, who, in passing, acknowledged Harry's salute with a charming smile, and exquisitely graceful bow. Arkwright scrutinised her closely, and apparently the conclusions he arrived at were satisfactory.

"She is a regular clipper, Harry—that's certain. I'll bet you a thousand dollars that in six weeks she will have promised to be my wife!"

"Bravo! Phil—your modesty's uncommonly refreshing; but I think the chances are against you. However, I can't afford to bet."

"Then you needn't; but whether you do or not, I'll place a thousand dollars at your disposal, if your fair friend does not surrender at discretion before this day six weeks!"

"Well," laughed Harry,—"that's plucky, at any rate; and, as I run no risk, agreed. But, mind you, I expect to handle the thousand dollars; for Alice Weldon is not to be caught, however tempting the lure, unless you can make an impression upon her heart."

"That is my risk—bury up the introduction, and leave the rest to me. When shall I see her?"

"Why, as you have given yourself but scant time, I suppose I had better manage it to-night. Shall I call round at eight o'clock, and take you to Mrs. Sanborn's?"

"Capital! Don't fail—I will be ready to the minute."

"Very well; I must be off now—good bye."

"Good bye, Harry; and remember my motto is—'faint heart never won fair lady.'"

Politeness whispers that, before pursuing the thread of my story, it will be only proper to place my readers in possession of a few facts respecting the two gentlemen whose conversation we have overheard. I may dismiss Henry Bowker with a line or two. He is a promising young lawyer, working rapidly into a good practice; a general favourite in the best social circles of Toronto; and, report says, is to be married in August to a bright blue-eyed fairy, who very properly reposes implicit confidence in

the love and tenderness of her prospective lord. As to Philip Arkwright—well, I don't think he is naturally a bad sort of a fellow. It is his misfortune, perhaps, rather than his fault, that "he struck ile." I believe he would have made a better man, if he hadn't entered into speculations which, in a few months, ranked him amongst the millionaires; but, perhaps, people generally wouldn't agree with me. It is said, in fact, that mothers, with marriageable daughters, who, two years back, looked with coolness upon Philip Arkwright, son of Silas Arkwright, the commission merchant, have lately discovered many noble qualities in Philip Arkwright, the wealthy oil speculator. I know, for certain, that more than one such mother is in the habit of speaking of him as "that dear Philip!" And many are the daughters who listen, nothing loth, while the gamut of his praise is being sung by those who once passed him unnoticed upon the street. Of course, this is all as it should be; but some old-fashioned people can't see it—they mutter strangely about "mercenary fortune hunters," &c.; but where is the use of listening to such people?—the world never does.

Diffidence was never one of Philip Arkwright's failings; even when he was plain Philip, his faith in his own resources was unbounded. In fact, it was sheer audacity which led him into the series of operations which resulted so brilliantly in a pecuniary sense. It is not to be wondered at, then, that when he saw riches rolling in upon him, his estimate of his own importance increased with his wealth. He visited Europe—made the *grand tour*—and returned to Canada rather more of the dandy, and quite as much of the egotist as when he left. He was warmly received by money-worshippers generally, and by many others who admired what was good in him. Among the latter class was Harry Bowker, who cherished something more than a passing regard for the man of money. They were friends in spite of Phil's egotism.

The conversation related above was held on King street, some few weeks after Philip's return. Perhaps, after perusing these explanatory paragraphs, my readers will wonder less at the confident tone he adopted in it.

CHAPTER II.

Will the reader kindly follow me to Mrs. Sanborn's. She is quite a favourite of mine—almost as much so, indeed, as her sister, Alice Weldon—*la belle Alice*—my charming heroine.

Mrs. Sanborn and Alice are orphans. Their parents both died within a few months after Mrs. Sanborn's marriage, and Alice had since, for the most part, resided with her sister. Mr. Sanborn occupied an important position in connexion with an English company, which had made Western Canada the basis of its operations. His duties not unfrequently called him to the old country, and at the date of my story he was absent on one of his periodical visits.

Having premised this, I will at once conduct the reader to a charming villa, on — street. It is surrounded with gardens, tastefully laid out, and as we tread the bright gravelled paths, and approach the house, we discover Mrs. Sanborn and Alice seated in the verandah. Apparently they are engaged in an interesting conversation; and, as I happen to know that it bears upon my story, we will avail ourselves of the privilege of overhearing it.

"I met Harry Bowker, on King street, this afternoon, Eva."

"Did you, Allie? I think I shall have to scold him when he visits us again. It must be ten days since he was here."

"Yes, quite—Mr. Arkwright was with him." "The man made of money; do you know him?"

"Yes, and no, dear; he has been pointed out to me, but has not had the honour of an introduction to your charming sister!"

"Indeed! is he good-looking?"

"Passably so; that is, for a *millionaire*!" "Hum! Harry must introduce him. Heigho! Allie, what if poor Fred should find another rival in him?"