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LEON GONDY.

A LEGEND OF GHEENT.

I.

Some three hundred years ago, there lived in the good old city of Ghent, a rich clothier and banker, by name Karl Rosenfelt. He was a man of mark and note, sage in counsel and eloquent in speech, a shrewd man of business, but, above all, a good and just citizen. His temper was merry, and no man at proper times was more jovial and pleasant. He was stout, rather tall, and altogether the very type of his class. His countenance was the reflection of the reality. It was intellectual, benevolent; and about his eyes and mouth there was an expression which warmed at once all who had occasion to address him. He had his faults—and who has not? He was obstinate to the last degree upon occasion, and rather timid in presence of physical danger. A bolder or firmer merchant, when facing commercial difficulties, has been rarely seen; but he shuddered at the sight of a sword, and when he travelled, lived in continual apprehension of attack and pillage. He was a widower, with one daughter, Edith, a very charming, simple, unaffected girl of seventeen, with a very peculiar education. Karl Rosenfelt intended her to be his successor. He certainly hoped that she would marry in due time, but he wished her to be able to carry on the business, if necessary, herself; at all events, to be able to understand her husband's affairs, and to aid with counsel and advice, if needful.

him, when one Rigardin, a French clerk, robbed him and fled, he made no active search, for he said: 'Ungrateful rascal though he be, he has injured himself most. I am not less considered, or even much less rich, while he is ruined. Let him go.' To replace Rigardin, who had been a confidential clerk, Karl took, on the strong recommendation of a Paris correspondent, one Leon Gondy, a well educated youth, who, wishing to learn business in Ghent, came gladly to the place. Leon Gondy, when our story commences, had been six months with the house of Rosenfelt. He was about nineteen, an eager scholar, attentive, but silent and thoughtful. He never neglected business; but often when his occupation was over, he would retire to his room, and remain for hours shut up, there devoting himself to meditation and the study of the poetical romances of the day, which, however crude and rapid in general, were the forerunners of great things. But Leon was none the worse at his figures, wrote a clear, good letter, and prepared the private books of his employer with diligence and patience. Karl liked him at once, and soon treated him as one of his own family, admitting him regularly into his intimacy, and making him the constant companion of his daughter. The two young people were soon great friends, and were a great mutual resource. Karl had too much good sense not to be fully prepared for the consequences. He knew many young men whom he would, in one sense, have preferred as a husband for his daughter, but now having finally given up the dream of his life, Leon was the only one who was placed in the circumstances which he thought likely to conduce to her happiness. Karl had no idea of happiness apart from the house; he wished his children to grow up identified with it—a part of it; and as the education of Leon was in his hands, he thought he could insure the continued prosperity of his fortune and the future well-being of his child at the same time.

As yet, however, he interfered in no way; he allowed things to take their course, and seemed occupied only with the commercial education of the young people. He soon had the satisfaction of perceiving that what he wished was likely to happen. Leon and Edith seemed never happy save in each other's society. They talked, they read, they sang, and they played the spinet together; they were often silent and contemplative; Leon would watch the door with unwearied patience when she was out; and, in fact, there were very evident signs of what was going on. But Leon began soon to be sad, very sad; Edith naively asked him what was the matter, but he did not know. At last he said that he thought his native air would do him good, and that he must return to France.

Karl was astonished to find his daughter in tears one morning, and still more so that she could not explain why. Some time after, however, she mentioned timidly, by the way, that Leon was about to ask for his dismissal on the plea of ill health. Karl smiled, and thought the time was come for him to interfere.

Karl was wont to sit in the evening in a large old-fashioned arm-chair, by a table, in a room furnished in the antique Flemish style, richly but heavily. A lamp illumined the table, on which rested some books, either of devotion or travels. Near him sat knitting a kind of half-attendant, half-duenna, who had waited on Edith from infancy, and was privileged to be wherever she pleased. Leon and Edith in general sat near a spinet, by the side of which was a table; here she worked when he read to her or talked. Sometimes they turned to the spinet, and played or sang. On the evening in question, things were as I have described. Leon was speaking in a low tone to Edith, who scarcely answered.