

ARDENT.

"The flame within my bosom, Kate,
Is burning warm for you;
And I am sure that you will make
A wife both kind and true.
So let the match be struck at once;
No longer let us wait;
I'm sure we've had enough of 'sparks.'
Let's form a cinder-Kate."

—[Puck.]

RECIPROCATIVE.

"Yes, let the match be struck at once;
I know your love is true.
And I am very willing, John,
To be a wife to you.
Indeed, to form a syndicate,
I anxiously have waited;
And by this kiss I think you'll own
My love is indicated."

—[Somerville Journal.]

The Professor's Darling.

AN ORIGINAL NOVEL.

CHAPTER X.

THE BOYS, AND CUMRIE CHASE.

The train rolled slowly into Charing Cross. Before it had fairly halted, Lottie opened the carriage door and sprang fearlessly upon the platform.

"She will kill herself some day, jumping out of trains in that fashion!" said her mother, looking at her in dismay. "Ah, here is Gordon! I thought he would come and meet us!"

The handsomest young man Stannie had ever beheld elbowed his way quickly through the crowd, and, after assisting his mother to alight, held out his hand to her, saying frankly, "You are Miss Ross; I am glad to see you at last. Your name has been a familiar word to us for years."

"I am equally glad to see you," said Stannie, continuing to gaze curiously at him.

He was quite a different type from the sturdy Scotch students in St. Breeda.

Tall and slender; his hair, which was as golden as her own, fell over his brow in a thick fringe; his eyebrows and moustache were two shades darker, and the contrast showed to advantage the exquisite fineness of his skin. His dress was marvellous in Stannie's eyes; knickerbockers, short coat, and vest were of the richest sage-green velvet, suitable perhaps, though fantastic, for the terraced gardens of Cumrie Chase, but incongruous at a railway station.

Neither dress nor fringe, however, produced an effeminate effect, and he looked just what he was—a young Englishman with fancies which contact with the world would efface in a few years; and money enough to indulge them, even when they took the extravagant form of travelling in a dusty railway carriage clad in velvet.

"Are you all very tired?" he asked, looking at the three travellers.

"Most people would be tired, unless they are made of cast-iron, after such a journey as we have had," said Lotty. "Scotland is a long way off, and St. Breeda is further. I feel like a collar without any starch, and mamma looks as if she had no backbone, but a limp elastic where that vertebra used to be. Are we going home to-night?"

"That is for mamma to decide. Would you like to remain in town all night?" he asked, turning to his mother.

"No; I am anxious to get home. I think we had better start at once for the other station. That is, if you are able for nearly four hours' more travelling, Stannie!"

"Oh, yes; I am not tired. I should like to get to Cumrie to-night."

"Then we had better get our boxes together and start. Are they all well at home, Gordon?"

"Yes; they are all right. Bill and Tom came up to town with me. Bill was bound on some secret mission of his own. Tom came to invest his savings in the purchase of a new fishing-rod and a fresh stock of goodness knows what for preserving rabbit-skins."

"Have they gone home?" asked Lotty, eagerly.

"No; we shall see them, I think, at the station. We concluded that mamma would go straight on, so they were to try and meet us there."

"How jolly! Stannie, you will see Tom in a few minutes, and if you are not glad you ought to be."

"Are you anxious to see the companion ornament?" asked Gordon, smiling. "They are a pretty arrangement, but rather more vivacious than ordinary ornaments. Lotty, is this all the luggage?"

"Yes. What a bother it is having to rush madly from one station to another! I should like one big station for all the trains."

"I dare say it might be managed to oblige you. Meanwhile, as we have some distance to go, will you get into this cab at once, or we shall be too late."

Two lads were looking anxiously out for them when they arrived at the other station, and Lotty, with her usual impulsiveness, opened the cab-door to be in readiness to leap out as soon as it stopped.

Tom was weighed down on each side with the new fishing-rod and numerous parcels, which he seemed unwilling to entrust to the care of an importunate porter, who had been delicately offering for the last five minutes to relieve him.

Lotty rushed at him and embraced him so violently that one of the treasured parcels drop-

ped from his hand, and the man pounced upon it triumphantly, upon which Tom offered no further resistance, but silently handed over the rest to him.

He was a handsome lad, with a ruddy complexion and large blue eyes, the very picture of an honest, manly schoolboy, who might possibly not be much credit to his master, and would regard books with an inborn aversion, but who would eulge himself to all who knew him, and in later years would do such work as fell to his hands well and bravely. He wore a rough gray tweed suit and knickerbockers, as Lotty had previously informed Stannie, who glanced immediately at his shapely limbs, and silently owned that they would do credit to a killed Highlander.

Bill was also laden with the fruits of his journey up to town—two large folios of venerable appearance, for which he had had a long and wearisome search at many an old bookstall.

He was as unlike his brothers in appearance as in character. His short, thick-set figure contrasted greatly with their tall elegance, and the kindly expression of his countenance alone redeemed it from absolute plainness.

Never were there brothers more differently constituted than the Hunters. Gordon was Nature's favourite. She had showered her gifts lavishly upon him; from head to foot there was no flaw in her handiwork. His disposition was amiable and generous to a fault, and his talents of no mean order; but he would never distinguish himself in literature or art—he dabbled in both—for the impetus arising from necessity was wanting. He played where he would have worked had he been a younger instead of an eldest son.

Dame Nature had been a niggard when the gods sat in council over Bill; but genius leaped into the gap, claiming him as her own, and dowered him with gifts which, being cultivated early, would one day yield a magnificent harvest.

Tom was unlike either. Handsome, fun-loving Tom had neither Gordon's brilliancy nor Bill's persevering cleverness; but he had a heart brimming over with love for all living creatures. Come bright or stormy weather, Tom would sing gaily through it to the end.

"We are just enough to fill a carriage," said Gordon, tossing his mother's wraps into an empty compartment. "Tom, perhaps you would rather travel in the van with your parcels. What have you got in all those brown paper bags? They look like groceries."

"There's sugar in one, and alum in another, and heaps of things," answered Tom, who was stowing his purchases safely into the netting overhead. "Isn't my rod a beauty? I'll lend it to you sometimes, if you like."

"It's not a bad affair, youngster. I'll take care of it when I do borrow it. Why do you buy your own sugar? Do they stint you at home?"

"It's maple sugar; not the common sort; such prime stuff. I'll give you some after we have started. Miss Ross, do you like maple sugar?"

"I never tasted it. Will you give me a little bit, too?"

"Yes; that is, if I can break it. It's as hard as—"

"Your own head," suggested Bill, seeing that he was at a loss for a simile.

"I think it's harder," said Tom, good-naturedly.

He was hammering at the block of maple saccharine with the knob end of Gordon's cane—the only visible result being a few slight dints upon its brown surface.

"It's dreadful stuff, Lotty! What am I to do?"

"Wrap the lump up well and dance upon it."

"Where did you buy your groceries?" asked Gordon. "Did you borrow a ticket for the Army and Navy Stores?"

"No; I got them in the City; and maple sugar isn't a grocery, it's a sweetmeat. I have no groceries except alum, and glue, and paint, and balls of twine, and nails, and screws, and fishing tackle, and some nuts, and other things."

"What an interesting list of purchases. Do take me with you the next time that you go shopping."

Tom gave no heed to Gordon's sarcasm, being wholly taken up by the crushing of his "sweetmeat," the particles of which were separating under the influence of several well-aimed stamps bestowed by his iron-heeled boots.

"I told you so," said Lotty, taking up the parcel; "such lovely bits!"

"Aren't they?" exclaimed the delighted Tom.

"Here's a lump for you, Miss Ross," offering her half a pound at least.

"Oh, a smaller piece," said Stannie; "I can't eat a quarter of that; and perhaps I shall not like it."

"Oh, yes, you will; everybody likes maple sugar. You can put what you don't eat just now into your pocket. Gordon, you don't deserve any, for chaffing me so; but here's some for you!" and he handed him a solid, brown wedge.

"My teeth!" groaned Gordon. "Mother, Tom is so prodigal with his stuff that, although we are ever so busy, we can't get through our portions before we reach Cumrie. Won't it be very undignified to arrive at the halls of our ancestors sucking maple sugar, like as many red Indian babies?"

"It will be dusk," said Mrs. Hunter. "No thank you, Tom dear; I don't care about any."

I know it's very good; I have eaten maple sugar often in Canada."

"Have you been there?" asked Stannie.

"Yes; long ago, when I was a girl, my father's regiment was stationed there for two years. I was as fond of maple sugar then as Tom is now."

"I hope I shall be sent to Canada when I am in the army," said Tom, with his mouth full. "The skating must be stunning there."

"And so is the cold," replied his mother.

"Tom," said Bill, from his corner, "with your kind permission, I'll pocket my share. Honour bright, I'll eat it all in the seclusion of my ancestral halls, as Gordon styles them. What have you done with all those oranges I saw you buying from an old lady?"

"They are up there. Will you have one? I'll get you one in a second."

"What did you think of Scotland, Lotty?" inquired Gordon.

"Oh, it's lovely! You never saw such colours in your life as there are upon the hills in the morning and at sunset. St. Breeda is like a beautiful place you might see in your dreams. Cumrie is nothing to it. You should go and visit Mr. Neil; he lives in the queerest, dearest little old house I ever saw, and he is very clever. Writes books of tremendous thickness. Yet when he speaks to you, you forget it. He never makes you feel your own ignorance."

"What a comfort that must have been in your case! If I go to Scotland, Miss Ross, will he take me in?"

"He would be delighted. You should go in summer; he has more spare time then than in winter. We have some glens and several waterfalls which you might like to see, as you are an artist."

"I should very much, and in return I would coax the Professor here, and show him our woods in Marshshire."

"He wouldn't look at them," said Lotty. "What are our woods in comparison with the great pine forests in Scotland! The sun can scarcely penetrate through the thick branches."

"I'll certainly go. My curiosity is quite excited by your vivid description. Tom, you will be sick; throw away that trash. Mother, at the lowest calculation, the youngster has eaten a pound."

"It's very wholesome," said Mrs. Hunter, utterly indifferent so long as Tom was happy.

"Have you commenced a new picture yet?" asked Lotty.

"Yes; I am painting Elma. I began some days ago."

"How is she dressed? I know your taste is remarkable in such things."

"Perhaps you have noticed that Elma has black hair—blue-black it might be called. She is to wear a crown of purple pansies and a scarlet dress."

"What!" exclaimed Lotty. "Purple and scarlet. The colours will scream at each other. Mamma, don't allow it. He will make a perfect caricature of her."

"Allow me to have some notion of colour, Lotty. Elma is very dark, and scarlet suits her better than anything; and those large, golden-eyed, purple pansies look magnificent among her black curls. I have studied colours for some time now, and know what blends well together. I wish that people had the courage to experiment a little more than they do, and not shriek out when one suggests varying the everlasting blues and pinks."

"Don't say anything till you see, Lotty. Remember Miss Manners, said Bill.

"Well, yes; Miss Manners was a success, Stannie. Miss Manners is a very largely-built girl, with hair like living embers. When she was staying with us last autumn we were all invited to a ball. It was a big affair to celebrate a son's majority, and naturally we were all anxious to look as lovely as possible. Miss Manners, not having confidence in her own taste, consulted the artist. He considered the matter for twenty-four hours, and then pronounced sentence on the victim. Purple velvet, with a wreath of marigold in her hair; a bunch of the same in the front of her dress. She thought he was joking when he proposed it, and we all laughed. However, when she saw that he was in earnest she said she would risk it. It was a risk; but truth compels me to admit that the effect was gorgeous. Some shades in the flowers were the same as her hair, and the brown tints seemed to throw a freshness over the whole, and the purple velvet made her skin look like alabaster. I know purple and marigold sounds vulgar, but the effect was perfect. So I shall not condemn Elma's pinks and red dress till tomorrow. Do you see a wood over there which has a clear space in the middle of it, Stannie? If you don't, stand up and look till you do!"

"Yes; I see it. There's a very large house in the space. What is it?"

"You are gazing on the home of the Hunters."

"The ancestral halls," said Bill. "Not that I ever heard of any of our ancestors having been born there."

"In half an hour you will be there, and we shall have the honour and felicity of presenting you to the other parent. He is as tall as Gordon, as handsome as Tom, as kind as mother, and as charming as myself. Greater praise I could give no one," said Lotty, laughing.

But Stannie felt a strange heart-sinking as she looked across the English meadows at the Hunters' stately home, gleaming fair and white in its noble park.

"You are welcome, Stansmore Ross—twice welcome, for your sake, and for your parents' as

well!" said Colonel Hunter on their arrival, shaking her hand long and kindly.

She stood shyly before him. The size and splendour of the room into which she had been led appressed and awed her, as much as did the commanding, soldierly bearing of the bronzed old Indian officer.

"You were a very little girl when I saw you last," he continued. "I suppose you don't recollect the day when I carried you on board the ship that was to take you to England?"

She looked up at him and her nervousness vanished. His countenance expressed so much benevolence and sympathy, that she felt as if she had found a long-lost friend. Lotty had not overrated "the other parent"; he was a man universally respected and beloved—especially beloved by the young, who saw in him one of the heroes of many an historical battle-field.

"I was a very little girl then," she answered; "only three years old."

"And you are seventeen now, eh? Not a very great age. Have you seen the whole family? I hope you are prepared to like us all?"

"I have not yet seen Alice and Elma. The others—the boys, I mean—met us in London."

"Boys!" said Bill, in affected wrath. "Tom is a boy, if you like, but Gordon and I are venerable individuals. Gordon came of age two years ago, and I am only two years his junior. My father is fond of telling us when we ask for a little pocket-money now and then that at our age he was earning his living."

"Were you really so?" asked Stannie.

"I wore the Queen's colours, at any rate, and had enough to buy my kid gloves," answered the Colonel. "Lotty, where is Alice? Miss Ross would like to remove her bonnet."

"Embracing mother in the hall—or, rather, was doing so, for here she is now."

Stannie turned and saw a tall, graceful girl, very like Gordon in feature and complexion, coming towards her. She noticed that her dress was peculiar, and her hair artistically dishevelled, but further observation was cut short by Alice taking both of Stannie's hands within her own, and kissing her.

"How tired you look, darling! Come with me; I'll give you some tea quietly in your own room to-night. The noise we make when we are a reunited family would make your head ache. Babel was nothing to it. Mother, will you not make yourself at home, and take off your things. What are you waiting for?"

"I thought Elma would have been here. Where is she?"

"She is busy in her own territory. I suppose she has not heard of your arrival. I left her looking much more for Tom. He likes them done in a peculiar manner, the secret of which is only known to their two selves. Come, Stannie, I'll take off your dusty wraps."

Taking Stannie's arm, she led her out of the room, and up a broad marble staircase covered with a Dutch carpet, into which their foot sank as it had been soft green moss; along corridors whose niches were filled with rare sculpture; until they reached the west wing of the house.

"I thought that you would like to be beside us," said Alice, opening a door, "so I had this room put in order for you. Lotty is on one side, and I am on the other; and the old nursery, which we call Elma's territory now, are at the end of the passage. What used to be our day nursery has been converted into a sort of odd room, where she and Tom, and sometimes Lotty, cook and work. I hope you will feel comfortable and at home with us. Do you think you will?"

"I don't know," said Stannie, glancing round the large room and noting its handsome furniture and pale blue satin window curtains. "I don't know; the house seems as large as the college. I don't wish to seem ungrateful when you are all so kind to me, but I can't help it. I wish I were at home again." And sitting down upon the nearest chair, she began to cry heartily.

"Home-sick already?" said Alice, gently. "We must try and cure that. The house does seem absurdly large at first to a stranger, but you know that's not our fault. Some ambitious old Hunter, with a mania for plenty of rooms, built it long ago. You will soon get used to it, and not think it at all too big."

While she spoke she had been removing Stannie's dusty hat and jacket, and was now kneeling down to unbutton her boots.

"Oh, please don't bother with my boots," sobbed Stannie; "please don't." Another sob. "They are so dusty, and your hands are so white!"

But Alice had already performed this kind office, and drew the boots from off the tired little feet.

"You are all so happy," said Stannie, continuing to sob, "and so much to one another; and I have no one but Uncle Alan, and have left him all alone in our poor little home in St. Breeda. I wish I had not come. I'll go back again at once."

"Not till you have got to know us all. You are tired out. Things will look brighter tomorrow, after you have had a sleep."

"The house will not look smaller, and—and it all seems so grand here, and different from my little home!"

"Stannie, it wouldn't be polite to laugh at you, but I really must if you persist in talking such nonsense. If we dwell in Buckingham Palace do you think that we should care less for our friends because they lived in shanties? Professor Neil is a great man, if he does live in a small house; and my father is the reverse,