

TO-MORROW.

BY ABBY SAGE RICHARDSON.

Out on the bench a maiden sits; With absent eyes and parted lips...

Oscar, on his side, seems to like Miss Batchford on better acquaintance. When I first presented him to her, he rather surprised me by changing colour and looking very uneasy.

[Note.—I really must break in here. Her aunt's "grand manner" makes me sick. It is nothing (between ourselves) but a look-nose and a stiff pair of stays.

As soon as my aunt left us together, the first words I said to Oscar, referred (of course) to his letter about Madame Pratolungo.

illah has been sent back from London to the rectory. The Dimchurch doctor (who attended Oscar, and who might have proved an awkward witness) is settled in India—as you will see, if you will refer to the twenty-second chapter.

September 2nd.—A rainy day. Very little said that is worth recording between Oscar and me.

My aunt, whose spirits are always affected by bad weather, kept me a long time in her sitting-room, amusing herself by making me exercise my sight.

I notice here what a dreadfully difficult thing it is to get back—in such a case as mine—to the exercise of one's sight.

new self, I hope and believe, with time—and that will accustom me to my new impressions of Oscar—and so it may all come right in the end.

I sent my second letter to my father to-day; telling him of Oscar's return from abroad, and asking him to write to him to get him to my first letter.

[Note.—I must trouble you with a copy of what Oscar really did write. It shows why he has not met her of late, and closed the envelope before she could come back.

This August writes, in Oscar's name and character, to the rector of Dimchurch. (He would find the imitation of his brother's handwriting no obstacle in his way.)

Dear Mr. Finch.—Lucilla's letter will have told you that I have come to my senses, and that I am again paying my addresses to her as her affianced husband.

Suecunt has behaved nobly. He absolves me from the engagements towards him into which I so rashly entered.

If you favour me with a reply to this, I must warn you to be careful how you write for Lucilla is sure to ask to see your letter.

me. Still, the subject is a sore one; and the less it is referred to the better.

Unless I add a word of explanation, here, you will hardly appreciate the extraordinary skillfulness with which the deception is continued by means of this postscript.

Written in Oscar's character (and representing Nugent as having done all that he had promised me to do) it designedly omits the customary courtesy of Oscar's style.

The rectory cut-off hand postscript signed "Oscar" was the very thing to exasperate the wound already inflicted on Mr. Finch's self-esteem.

But even the cleverest people are not always capable of providing for every emergency.

The postscript, as you have seen, was a little masterpiece. But it nevertheless exposed the writer to a danger which (as the Journal will tell you) he only appreciated at its true value when it was too late to alter his mind.

Well, I amused my aunt. And what effect did I produce on Oscar?

If I could trust my eyes, I should say I produced exactly the contrary effect on him—I made him melancholy.

Or, is it, that he sees and feels something changing in me? I could scream with vexation and rage against myself.

September 3rd.—Oscar has (I suppose) forgotten something which he ought to have included in his postscript to my letter.

More than two hours after I have sent it to the post, he asked if the letter had gone. For the moment, he looked annoyed when I said, Yes, but he soon recovered himself.

"Do you think she is likely to be in corres-

pondence with your father, or your stepmother, while she is out of England?" he asked.

"I should doubt her writing to my father," I said. "But she might correspond with Mrs. Finch."

"How long do you stay here?" he inquired. "It depends on Herr Grosse," I answered.

"Are you tired of Ramsgate already?" I asked.

"Let me be your husband, Lucilla," he whispered; "and I will live at Ramsgate if you like—for your sake."

Although there was everything to please me in those words, there was something that started me—not describe it—in his look and manner when he said them.

"Why should we not be married at once?" he asked. "We are both of age. We have only ourselves to think of."

[Note.—After his words as follows: "Why should we not be married at once?" Mademoiselle could not but be struck with surprise—and not with rightly so (in my view). The situation is now fast becoming a comedy of errors. Mademoiselle is now in the habit of writing to my aunt, and my aunt, in her replies, can truthfully say that she has not received a letter from Lucilla.

"You forget," I answered, more surprised than ever; "we have my father to think of. It was always arranged that he was to marry us at Dimchurch."

Oscar smiled—not at all the charming smile I used to imagine when I was blind!

"We shall wait a long time, I am afraid," he said, "if we wait until your father marries us."

"What do you mean?" I asked. "When we enter on the painful subject of Madame Pratolungo," he replied, "I will tell you. In the meantime, do you think Mr. Finch will answer your letter?"

"I hope so."

"Do you think he will answer my postscript?"

"I am sure he will!"

The same unpleasant smile showed itself again in his face. He abruptly dropped the conversation, and went to play his piquet with my aunt.

All this happened yesterday evening. I went to bed, sadly dissatisfied with somebody. Was it with Oscar? or with myself? or with both?

To-day we went out together for a walk on the cliffs. What a delight it was to move through the fresh briny air, and see the lovely sights on every side of me!

There were chairs on the bench. We hired two, and sat down to look about us.

All sorts of diversions were going on. Monkeys, organs, girls on stilts, a conjurer, and a troop of negro minstrels, were all at work to amuse the visitors.

I felt as if two eyes were not half enough to see with! A nice old lady, sitting near, entered into conversation with me; hospitably offering me biscuits and sherry out of her own bag.

Oscar, to my disappointment, looked quite disgusted with all of us. He thought my nice old lady vulgar; and he called the company on the beach "a herd of snobs."

But even the cleverest people are not always capable of providing for every emergency. The completest plot generally has its weak place.

Oscar seemed to be wonderfully interested about my father. "Very little chance?" he repeated. "Why?"

"As long as I am with Miss Batchford," I said, "it is useless to hope that my father will come here. They are on bad terms; and I am afraid there is no prospect of their being friends again.

"I am afraid," he exclaimed, looking the picture of astonishment. "What could possibly make you think that? Write by all means—and leave a little space for me. I will add a few lines to your letter."

It is impossible to say how his answer relieved me. It was quite plain that I had stupidly misinterpreted him. Oh, my new eyes!

[Note.—I must intrude myself again. I shall burst with indignation, while I am copying the journal, if I don't relieve my mind at certain places in it. Remark, before you go any farther, how skillfully Nugent contrives to ascertain his exact position at Ramsgate—and see with what a fatal unanimity all the characters of this personifying Oscar, without discovery, declare themselves in his favour!

Oscar looked at me very attentively; and sat down again, without saying a word more.

POOR MISS FINCH: A DOMESTIC STORY. By WILKIE COLLINS. PART THE SECOND. CHAPTER XLIII. LUCILLA'S JOURNAL CONTINUED.

September 1st.—I am composed enough to return to my Journal, and to let my mind dwell in a little on all that I have thought and felt since Oscar has been here.

Now that I have lost Madame Pratolungo, I have no friend with whom I can talk over my little secrets. My aunt is all that is kind and good to me; but with a person so much older than I am—who has lived in such a different world, and whose ideas seem to be so far away from mine—how can I talk about my follies and extravagances, and expect sympathies in return?

Well, my dear Journal, how did I feel—after longing for Oscar—when Oscar came to me? It is dreadful to own it; but my book looks up, and my book can be trusted with the truth.

No. "Disappointed" is not the word. I can't find the word. There was a moment—I hardly care write it; it seems so atrociously wicked—there was a moment when I almost wished myself blind again.

He took me in his arms; he held my hand in his. In the time when I was blind, how I should have felt it! How the delicious tingle would have run through me when he touched me! Nothing of the kind happened now.

When Grosse comes next, I shall put that question to him.

In the meanwhile, I have had a second disappointment. He is not nearly so beautiful as I thought he was when I was blind.

On the day when my handage was taken off for the first time, I could only see indistinctly. When I ran into the room in the rectory, I guessed it was Oscar rather than knew it was Oscar.

When he cannot see me, I close my eyes, and let my ears feel the old charm again—so far. And this is what I have gained, by submitting the operation, and enduring my imprisonment in the darkened room!

What am I writing? I ought to be ashamed of myself! Is it nothing to have had all the beauty of land and sea, all the glory of cloud and sunshine, revealed to me? Is it nothing to be able to look at my fellow-creatures—to see the bright faces of children smile at me when I speak to them?

My aunt approves of him. She thinks him handsome, and says he has the manners of a gentleman. This last is high praise from Miss Batchford. She despises the present generation of young men. "There is no variety, no distinction among them," she said the other day. "They are all mechanical copies of each other."

Let me write about Oscar.



HE MADE SO MANY MISTAKES IN PLAYING CARDS WITH MY AUNT, THAT SHE DISMISSED HIM FROM THE GAME IN DISGRACE.

"Why should we spoil the pleasure of our first meeting by talking of her?" he said. "It is so inexpressibly painful to you and to me. Let us return to it in a day or two. Not now, Lucilla—not now!"

"His brother was the next subject in my mind. I was not at all sure how he would take my speaking about it. I risked a question however, for all that. He made another sign of contrition, and looked distressed again.

"My brother and I understand each other, Lucilla. He will remain abroad for the present. Shall we drop that subject too? Let me hear your own news—I want to know what is going on at the rectory. I have heard nothing since you wrote me word that you were here with your aunt, and that Madame Pratolungo had gone abroad to her father. Is Mr. Finch well? Is he coming to Ramsgate to see you?"

"I was unwilling to tell him of the misunderstanding at home."

"I have not heard from my father since I have been here," I said. "Now you have come back, I can write and announce your return, and get all the news from the rectory."

"He looked at me rather strangely—in a way which led me to fear that he saw some objection to my writing to my father."

"I suppose you would like Mr. Finch to come here?" he said—and then stopped suddenly, and looked at me again.

"There is very little chance of his coming here," I answered.

Oscar seemed to be wonderfully interested about my father. "Very little chance?" he repeated. "Why?"

"I was obliged to refer to the family quarrel—still, however, saying nothing of the unjust manner in which my father has spoken of my aunt."

"As long as I am with Miss Batchford," I said, "it is useless to hope that my father will come here. They are on bad terms; and I am afraid there is no prospect of their being friends again."

"I suppose you would like Mr. Finch to come here?" he said—and then stopped suddenly, and looked at me again.

It is impossible to say how his answer relieved me. It was quite plain that I had stupidly misinterpreted him. Oh, my new eyes!

We have a cat and a dog in the house. Would it be credited, if I was telling it to the world instead of telling it to my Journal, that I actually mistake one for the other to-day?—after seeing so well, too, as I do now, and being able to write with so few mistakes in making my letters! It is nevertheless true that I did mistake them; having trusted to nothing but my memory to inform my eyes which was which. I instead of helping my memory by my touch, which I have now set this right. I caught up puss, and shut my eyes (oh, that habit! when should I get over it?) and felt her soft fur (so different from a dog's hair) and opened my eyes again, and associated the feel of it for ever afterwards with the sight of a cat.

To-day's experience has also informed me that I make slow progress in teaching myself to judge correctly of distance.

In spite of this drawback, however, there is nothing to enjoy so much in using my sight as looking at a great wide prospect of any kind—provided I am not asked to judge how far or how near objects may be. It seems like escaping out of prison to look (after having been shut up in my blindness) at the long curve of the beach, and the bold promontory of the pier, and the great sweep of the sea beyond;

visible from our windows. The moment my aunt begins to question me about distances, she makes a tail of my pleasure. It is worse still when I am asked about the relative sizes of ships and boats. When I see nothing but a land, I fancy it larger than it is. When I see the boat in comparison with a ship, and then look at the boat, I instantly go to the other end of the scale, and fancy it smaller than it is.

The same thing still vexes me almost as keenly as my stupidity ever did in some time since when I saw my first horse cart from an upper window, and took it for a dog drawing a wheelbarrow! I do not mean in my own defence that both horse and cart were figured at least five times their proper size in my blind fancy—which makes my mistake, I think not so very stupid after all.

Well, I amused my aunt. And what effect did I produce on Oscar?

If I could trust my eyes, I should say I produced exactly the contrary effect on him—I made him melancholy. But I don't trust my eyes. They must be deceiving me when they tell me that he looked, in my company, a mooping, anxious, miserable man.

Or, is it, that he sees and feels something changing in me? I could scream with vexation and rage against myself. Here is my Oscar—and yet he is not the Oscar I know when I was blind. Contradictory as it seems, I used to understand how he looked at me, when I was unable to see it. Now that I can see, I am unable to see it. Now that I can see, I am unable to see it. Now that I can see, I am unable to see it.

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