

SUMMER AND AUTUMN.

Gorgeous leaves are whirling down,
Homeward comes the scented bay,
O'er the stubble, near and brown,
Flaunt the autumn flowers gay:
Ah, alas!
Summers pass—
Like our joys, they pass away

Fanned by many a balmy breeze,
In the spring I loved to lie
'Neath the newly-budded trees,
Gazing upward to the sky:
But, alas!
Time will pass,
And the flowers of spring must die!

Off a maiden sat with me,
Listening to the thrush's tone,
Warbled forth from every tree
Ere the meadow hay was mown:
But, alas!
Summers pass—
Now, I wander all alone!

Love, like summer time, is fair,
Decked with buds and blossoms gay:
But upon this autumn air
Floats a voice, which seems to say,
"Love, alas!
Also pass,
As the summers pass away!"

GEORGE ARNOLD.

NEMOROSA.

II.

In the height of a glorious month of August, when the leafy retreats of the forest were at their loveliest, and the resinous fragrance of the pines filled the air on dewy mornings, and the cool evening breezes on the high lands were like draughts of life—when lazy artists, lying supine at noonday, smoked pipe after pipe, gazing sleepily up at the green canopy overhead and swearing that it was too hot to think of work—when Madame Vanne, proudly surveying her orchard and kitchen-garden, predicted such a fruit year as had never been known; and when all the world was rejoicing in mere existence, Victor Berthon was an entirely unhappy man. He could not give himself any definite reason for his unhappiness; and that made it all the worse. He was an object of ill-concealed envy to all his friends; Nemorosa was as kind to him as she had ever been—perhaps, if anything, a shade kinder; he met her constantly; there were merry evenings at Marlotte and joyous little *franco-lunch-on-parties* in the woods; and all seemed to be going as smoothly as could be; but, for all that, he knew very well that something was amiss. His lover's instinct told him that Marguerite did not love him; and if it had not seemed impossible he would almost have fancied that he had a rival. What ailed the girl that she was in wild spirits at one moment and plunged in a melancholy day-dream the next? He could not flatter himself that these significant symptoms were in any way connected with his own presence. Once or twice it had occurred to him to wonder whether she was always alone during those protracted rambles which had latterly become of somewhat more frequent occurrence; but he put this suspicion away from him with a feeling of shame, declaring to himself that Marguerite was incapable of duplicity.

In truth the suspicion was only too well founded; and yet the girl was not intentionally deceitful. She was very sorry for Victor, and would gladly have made him understand that his suit was hopeless; but how is one to answer a question that has never been put? Of a deceit which most people would have counted far more heinous—namely, that she had omitted to inform her worthy old aunt that she was in the habit of continually meeting in the forest a gentleman of a rank evidently above her own—her conscience did not excuse her. She had always been reserved, always been allowed to go her own way, and to speak or hold her peace as she pleased. Besides, there was nothing to tell. She made no appointments with the unknown; only, somehow or other, she was forever coming across him; and she was too little acquainted with the world and its ways to see any harm in that. She had never cared to ask him his name; when she thought of him she called him René, and he was her ideal; and he talked to her as no one had ever talked before; and in the depths of her heart she knew, or thought she knew, that he loved her; and in a still deeper depth she was aware that she loved him. It was all utterly vague—much too vague for the question of difference of rank to have disturbed her.

Thus it was that Victor Berthon was uneasy, without knowing why, and jealous of he knew not what; and it was really in some sense a god-send to him when a palpable object of jealousy presented itself. It chanced on a sultry afternoon that some errand took Marguerite to Montigny, where Victor met her; and the two were standing talking by the dusty wayside when suddenly a brilliant apparition, in the shape of an officer of hussars, flashed upon them. This officer was young and good-looking and had a fine black moustache, and the blue and scarlet and silver of his uniform became him admirably, and he was mounted upon an Arab charger with a curved neck and a beautiful long tail, and was altogether the sort of person whom a civilian in a shabby coat might reasonably regard with suspicion. Greatly to Victor's disgust the new-comer drew rein in front of the couple by the roadside, and raising his cap inquired, with an insinuating smile, whether this were the village of Montigny-sur-Loing. On

receiving an affirmative reply he pursued, smiling more insinuatingly than ever, "Perhaps mademoiselle would have the extreme kindness to point out to me the situation of the manufactory of pottery?"

There is nothing like these hussars for impudence. What business had the fellow to address himself to a lady, when there was a man standing by ready to give him any reasonable information of which he might be in need? It was already annoying enough that such a liberty should have been taken; but what was a great deal worse was that Marguerite should stop forward with positive alacrity, and answer, "Certainly, monsieur; it is but a few minutes' walk from here. I will show you the way."

Off she started, without so much as a glance at her lover. The hussar rode beside her, bending down to talk to her as they went; and soon a turn in the road hid them from sight.

At first Victor felt that it would be inconsistent with his dignity to follow them; but when ten minutes had elapsed and Marguerite did not reappear, anxiety got the upper hand of pride, and he strolled down the road with his hands in his pocket, thinking bitter things of the whole female sex.

The manufactory consists of a few unpretending buildings, grouped together among the willows and alders that flank the sluggish Loing. In one of these there is a small show-room, where specimens of the art-produce of the place are displayed for the benefit of casual visitors; and pausing before the open door of this ante-chamber Victor could hear the voices of the proprietor, the hussar and Marguerite engaged in animated conversation within. A little boy was leading the Arab charger up and down in the shade. While Victor was hesitating whether to enter or not, a showy, open carriage dashed up, in which sat a very fashionably-attired lady. At the sound of the wheels the officer came out hastily, and was greeted by a nonchalant, "Ah, M. de Chaulnes, is that you?" After which the two went into the house together, and Victor lighted a cigarette and waited outside for Marguerite to emerge.

She emerged after a time with the others; and the proprietor, catching sight of Victor, cried, "Ah! here, madame, is precisely one of my best artists, M. Berthon."

The lady bowed graciously and said some pretty things, which failed to restore M. Berthon to good humour. It was not pleasant to be exhibited in that fashion, as though he were a tailor's foreman, and he threw an angry glance at his employer. But that worthy man was devoid of all fine feeling. He went on with a shrug of his shoulders:

"These gentlemen give me a great deal of trouble, madame. I have to pay them very highly, and they work when it is their good pleasure. What would you have? I should do a better business with inferior workmen; but when I started I promised myself to produce nothing second-rate."

"Oh!" answered the lady politely, "we all know that genius must be left free, and that inspiration does not come to order. It would be too much presumption to dictate to an artist; but if I were M. Berthon, I know where I should turn for my next subject. There," she continued, pointing to Marguerite, who was leaning against the door-post, twisting between her fingers a spray of the climbing vine that covered the wall—a tall, white figure, half in shadow, half in moonlight—"there is a picture ready made."

Having thus made herself agreeable all round, this urbane personage got into her carriage and was driven away, the hussar riding beside her. She had left her name and address—the Countess de Valmy, Fontainebleau—and, as her purchases had not been less extensive than her manners had been charming, she left a highly favourable impression behind her into the bargain. Even Victor allowed that the woman had a pleasant way with her.

As for the young officer of hussars, that was another thing. When Marguerite went home that night, she described a group of artists, gathered in front of the little inn at Marlotte, laughing heartily over a sheet of drawing-paper which Victor was holding up for their inspection, and, approaching to see what might be the cause of their merriment, she beheld a rough sketch representing a cavalry officer, with a gigantic moustache and a sabre as big as himself, astride upon an animal which much resembled a rocking-horse.

"It is D. Chaulnes to the life!" cried one of the young men, whose rank and fortune were somewhat above those of his fellows, and who was understood to mix freely in the most distinguished Parisian circles. "If I were you, Berthon, I would not make him a present of that likeness. De Chaulnes, you see, is a man who appreciates himself at his full value."

"That I can quite believe," remarked Victor sardonically.

"Yes; and he is capable of eating you up, body and bones, if you permit yourself to laugh at him."

"Perhaps I might stick in his throat. Mademoiselle, I am sorry to see, has not a word of praise for my poor effort."

"I do not like caricatures," answered Marguerite coldly, turning away. "There is nothing funny in this one; and anybody can be ill-natured."

So Victor returned to Montigny in the sulks, and did not honour the customary symposium with his company that evening.

Marguerite however was present at it for a short time. She came ostensibly to ask whether

M. Royer had returned from Paris, but in reality to make her peace with Victor, to whom she felt that she had been rude and unkind. Not finding him there, she lingered awhile in the hope that he might yet appear; and, by way of passing the time, she related the incident of Madame de Valmy's visit to Montigny. "Did anybody know the lady?" she inquired.

The young man who had so promptly recognized the portrait of M. de Chaulnes nodded two or three times significantly and laughed a little. "I know her," he said; and his tone appeared to imply that what he knew was not greatly to her advantage. "Somebody told me the other day that she was spending the summer at Fontainebleau," he continued, "and I wondered what in the world could have brought her to such a sleepy place. But some people are clever enough to find amusement anywhere; and she is fond of amusing herself, that dear countess. So she happened to meet De Chaulnes at Montigny, did she? His regiment has been ordered to Fontainebleau, I hear."

"Come, Ravillier, none of your scandalous stories," broke in his neighbour warningly. For it must be recorded to the credit of the young gentlemen that they kept a very strict watch over their tongues in the presence of Nemorosa.

"My dear fellow, I am not telling scandalous stories. Madame de Valmy is not scandalous; far from it. She is discretion itself—after a certain point. Her husband is scandalous, if you like. They say he made the poor countess shed bitter tears during the first year of their marriage; but she dried them long ago, or somebody dried them for her. Anyhow, they ceased to flow. Now-a-days it is she who goes about the world smiling, and he who wears a dismal countenance. Everybody is very sorry for him—particularly the ladies. To look at him, with his haggard face and half-shut eyes, you would say he was the picture of an injured and heart-broken husband. That is his rôle, I believe. It is very amusing."

"Is M. de Valmy also at Fontainebleau?" asked Marguerite, suddenly.

"I believe so. You will know him at once if you meet him. A tall, thin man, slightly bald, with a fair complexion and dull, blueish-coloured eyes, who looks as if he hardly thought it worth while to go on living much longer. I think, mademoiselle," added this sapient youth, hesitatingly, "that if you should meet him and if he should speak to you (as he probably would), you would do just as well not to answer him."

The advice was doubtless excellent; but it partook of the nature of good advice generally in being of very little practical service. For alas! M. de Valmy had already spoken and had been answered at considerable length.

Marguerite escaped from the room somehow—how she hardly knew—without betraying her secret, and hurrying home, threw herself face downward upon her bed, dazed and sickened by the blow which had fallen upon her. She had never known pain, mental or physical, in her life before, and it affected her with something of the surprise and anger which wild creatures feel when they are wounded. It was not with M. de Valmy that she was angry; she kept repeating this to herself as she lay there, dry-eyed and motionless, through the long night hours. He had never spoken to her of love, much less of marriage; she herself had scarcely thought of their intimacy in that way until now. It was not by him but by her own insensate folly that she had been deceived; and there might have been a sort of miserable consolation in this view if it had been really heartfelt. But in truth, M. de Valmy, if he had not said much, had given a great deal to be understood; and whatever protestations Marguerite might make to herself, she knew with the crumbling of her happiness her idol too had fallen to pieces. All was lost; it only remained for her to die. So she murmured again and again with the impatience and ignorance natural to her age.

The first peep of dawn saw her stealing out of the house and down the village street into the glades of the forest. She would be expected to keep one of those unspoken trysts to which allusion has been made, at eleven o'clock, on the heights of La Solle, some four miles away, and she resolved that for the last time she would be true to it. Wandering up hill and down dale, straying through many devious ways and pausing often with a vain and painful effort to shape the chaos of her mind into some clear purpose, she yet reached the appointed spot long before the appointed time; and having reached it, seated herself upon a rock and waited without impatience. Whoever yet wished to hasten the hour of his execution? It may even have been that Marguerite, like many of those appointed to die, may have had a vague fancy that all was not over, since the end had not come, and may have hoped against hope for some impossible reprieve.

She sat, with one knee drawn up and her hands clasped round it, gazing in a sort of melancholy bewilderment at the familiar prospect before her. Beneath her was the sandy foot-path, twisting and turning through a labyrinth of rocks and broken ground which they call the *Chemin des Aristes*; beyond lay the broad Vallée de la Solle, with its old beech trees overshadowing a thick growth of bracken and broom; and beyond that again rose wooded hills bathed in the sunny mists of morning. In the far distance somebody was blowing a French horn, the blasts which were echoed and re-echoed through the still air. Nature was cruel, and showed no sympathy with one of her most ardent votaries;

the forest, like the banks and braes of the bonny Doon, persisted in looking its fairest, though Nemorosa's heart was breaking.

At length the sound of rapidly approaching footsteps was audible; he was coming! Marguerite did not stir. She remained motionless while he drew nearer and nearer; she waited till he was close to her, till his shadow fell upon her, till he touched her shoulder; and then (for she had prepared herself for this moment and knew what she had to do) she rose to her full height, and looking him straight in the eyes, said, "Good morning, M. de Valmy."

Well, it was a failure. He did not start, nor turn pale, nor turn red, nor stagger back, striking his forehead with a gesture of dismay. He did none of these things; he only looked a trifle put out, and said, "So somebody has told you my name. I am sorry for it. I would rather have been only René to you."

"I never called you René!" exclaimed Marguerite indignantly.

"Did you not? I fancied—but no doubt it was only fancy. I hope you will always call me René in future."

This was so utterly unlike what Marguerite had anticipated that all her premeditated speeches went out of her head, and she remained silent for a few minutes. Then she said with simple directness:

"I shall not need to call you by one name or another in future. I shall not see you any more after to-day. It is not right."

"Not right?" he echoed, looking dreamily away from her across the blue mists of the valley; "who knows what is right? The priest has one definition, the law has another, society has a third. For my own part it seems to me that whatever is beautiful, whatever lifts us above the pettiness of daily life, must be right."

"You make things very hard for me," cried Marguerite, with an impatient shake of the shoulders; "you make me say what I do not like to say. I know it cannot be right for me to meet you as I have been doing, and—and—I don't think Madame de Valmy would approve of it."

He turned and looked at her with a smile and a frown. "Some one has been putting notions into your head. You talk like a little *bourgeoise*, not like Nemorosa, *Reine des Bois*."

"And you talk like—like Mr. de Valmy, I suppose. I am not Nemorosa; I am only Marguerite Vanne, the grand-daughter of a peasant who would touch his cap to you and call you 'Monsieur le Comte' if he were still living. But that is nothing. It is not because you are so far above me in rank that I should be afraid to walk and talk with you, but because—"

"Well? because?"

"Because—of your wife," answered Marguerite, blushing suddenly all over her face and neck, and lowering her eyes.

"My wife!" he repeated with bitter contempt; "oh, my wife! Listen, Marguerite: if you would know anything about my wife you would know that she is a woman of whom all Paris talks with a peculiar kind of awe. I do not wish to speak of her. All I will say is that I owe her nothing. My life is as miserable as one can well be; but since I have known you and loved you—yes, loved you; it cannot surely be any surprise to you to hear me say that—it has had more brightness than I thought it could ever have again. Do not refuse me a few happy hours. I shall only be in Fontainebleau for another month or two, and all I implore is to be allowed to see you sometimes. That is not very much to ask."

The astounding selfishness of this speech failed to strike Marguerite as it might have done a less partial hearer; but she shook her head. "We must part," she said.

M. de Valmy's eyes flashed. "I will not part from you!" he exclaimed passionately. "I love you; I know—no, do not deny it; it would be useless—I know that you love me. What are conventionalities to us? Can we not agree to forget for a few sunny afternoons that I am a slave?"

"Ah!" she cried, "now you insult me!"

And without waiting to hear more, without a word or a sign of farewell, she turned from him and fled.

He followed her, calling out "Marguerite! Marguerite!" She heard him crashing heavily after her through the thickets which she treaded with the agility of a hare; but she never turned her head, and he soon abandoned the chase. Truth to tell, he was neither as young nor as active as he had once been; moreover, he had a strong sense of the ridiculous—a strong sense, that is, of the unpleasantness of appearing ridiculous—so he let her go.

Marguerite knew that she was safe, but that did not prevent her from running on at the top of her speed for a couple of miles or more. She was close to Fontainebleau when her progress was arrested by the sound of voices in the immediate neighbourhood. She advanced cautiously a few paces to the edge of one of those grassy *carrefours* which are dotted at intervals all over the forest, and which form the meeting point of many tracks. Leaning against the pedestal of the iron cross which stood in the centre of this space was a lady who strongly resembled an illustration from the *Journal des Mœurs*, and by her side was a gentleman in hussar uniform. Their backs were turned to the intruder, otherwise the gentleman would hardly have been kissing the lady's hand with so much fervour. The latter responded by playfully bending him on the shoulder with her parasol and Marguerite heard her say, "Enough