

AN AUTUMN SONG.

Cold blows the Autumn wind and drear,
From out the lowering west;
Low wall the crimsoned leaves and sear,
As if they longed for rest.

Upon my heart they seem to fall
And stay its joyful tone,
Awakening there a plaintive call—
The echo of the fane.

O forest leaves, from yonder trees
You're borne on languid wing,
Nor hear within the wandering breeze
One whisper of the Spring.

While far beyond the sky's dark cloud,
I know the stars shine clear,
And that beneath the Autumn shroud
Awaits the future year.

THOU EVERYWHERE.

(From the German of Schultze.)

When the evening glow is dying,
Rise the moon and stars on high,
When the stars and moon are fading,
Steps the sun into the sky.

In the heavens' crimson glory,
In the sun's illumining glance,
In the moon and all the planets,
See I but thy countenance.

Other forms may pass before me,
None I seem to heed but thine,
From afar I feel thy coming,
As if thy thought called to mine.

Yet when thou art by me sitting—
Then, indeed, I nothing see,
For my eyes o'erflow with weeping,
Joy and pain come over me.

Ah, I wish not to forget thee,
Cruel though the memory be,
Ever art thou near my spirit,
Though forever far from me.

GOWAN LEA.

COUSIN GEORGE.

A WOMAN'S STORY.

I.

This morning I have been, as usual with me when the weather is fine, idling away an hour in the pretty garden that surrounds our cottage home on Lake Ontario. It is the bonny spring time; the air is deliciously cool; the early flowers are fragrance itself; the waters of the lake shine brightly through the trees, and all the scene is peace. How is it that at moments when these influences are around us the memory is so very active, and trains of recollection pass before our mental vision as if revived realities? The shape of a bough, the shadow of a passing cloud, above all, the scent of a flower, carries us back through the story of our lives. I know that in this matter I am but repeating the experience of most of us; but the subject is curious and suggestive. Well, on this particular morning my senses are, I suppose, unusually acute, and, stirred by I know not what, I seem to pass through some episodes of my life, the recollection of which I would fain avoid. The ghosts of the past are around me again, and refuse to be exorcised by the mere effort of my will. The best way, they say, is, under such circumstances, to accept the situation, and, that this may be effected cheerfully, to write the story down and have done with it. I will do so.

In this old cottage, then, I, the only child and daughter of a well-to-do farmer first saw the light. My father and mother were plain people, and content with the moderate pleasures which their home and the locality provided. Everything about the place was substantial and good. Show they cared little for, and I think I was pretty much of the same disposition, as soon as I began to reason at all upon the small intrinsic value of much that so many highly prize. At all events, my training was one of industry at my lessons, industry at my household duties, and, indeed, industry in all things. And I was satisfied, nay, more, happy. My mother—dear, good mother—and I, loved each other with as much confidence as affection, and I was as fond of father as he was of his little Mary, grave as he was, as a rule, though never to me.

Not far from our homestead was that owned by my mother's brother, also a farmer, where he and his wife and their only son George lived. George was but a little boy when my narrative commences, and I but a little girl; and as the two houses were on very intimate terms, our childish sports and rambles were generally together. I can recall now how, many a time, when the two families visited each other, we little ones would sit side by side by the great wood fire, and how, glancing at us, the old folks would smile at each other significantly. I did not know what they meant then, but there came a time when all was clear to me.

The years sped past, and George was sent away to college. I was to remain at home, and gain such knowledge as my parents could impart, which was, indeed, neither extensive nor varied. But a strong love of reading was very early one of my characteristics, and I picked up much information, more or less valuable, in a desultory way. And so our lives glided on, the occasional visits of George the only breaks in their peaceful monotony. It will have been surmised, meantime, though not distinctly stated, that our parents regarded us as youthful lovers, to be some day more closely linked together. Not that I had realized this myself, but it appeared that George had, for there came an hour when he

spoke out, and told me that he loved me. It was one evening—the next day he was to return to college for the last time. We were walking slowly along the banks of a little stream near the house, my hand in his. The golden sunset was fading rapidly, leaving faint reflections upon the pink and violet cloud-flecked sky. The birds had gone home, only a softly-tittered good-night sounding now and then from the leafy coverts. All was so still as to be almost oppressive. We had not spoken for several minutes, and I had a growing sense of something coming.

"Mary," said he at last, "I wonder how much you really care for me?"

"What a question, George," I answered. "You knew we have always been very dear to each other."

"Yes, but that is not what I mean. I am going away to-morrow. I am almost a man, and soon shall be one quite. You have been in my thoughts all the time I have been absent from you. Your presence has existed with me in the class-rooms and the lecture-hall and in my solitary walks, and even my dreams were constantly of you. Mary, when we were children we loved as children do. Now it is different. I love you now, passionately, with my whole heart, and I feel as if my whole future depends on you alone. Speak to me, dearest, will you not?"

I was glad, oh, how glad! Now I understood myself. Had he not known all the while what I now knew, that I was wholly his? Did he not know that he was my hope, my love, my all? The happy tears that were streaming down my face as I lifted it to his, needed no words, and with that moment a new life began for both of us. Oh, yes! we exchanged vows of constancy, of course, and in my heart of hearts I registered a vow that, whatever came, I would be faithful unto death. Trials, misfortunes, nothing on earth should shake my loyalty to this my first and only love. How long we talked together after this I cannot tell, but the lamps were lighted when we entered my home, and faced the four dear ones waiting for us. Tea was soon over, myself in a flurried state that subjected the old china cups to many a narrow escape, and made father say, with a twinkle in his eye: "Why, what's the matter, Mary! You seem struck comical to-night." Mother said nothing, but smiled to herself in a quiet way that made one feel worse still. I was thankful when the meal was over and I could settle down in a corner with my sewing, and still more so when our guests departed and I was at liberty to seek my chamber for the night.

Not to sleep, however, just yet, for I had hardly laid my head upon the pillow when mother came to my bedside, and bending her kind face down with a tender kiss, whispered to me to tell her all. With my arms about her neck, and my blushes hidden in her bosom, I sobbed forth the happy story, and her tears mingled with mine as she prayed God to bless her darling child and him who was to be as her darling son. As I listened to the solemn words a great content stole over me, and the future was full of hope and joy. Next morning, father, too, blessed me, and, as he folded me to his heart, said I should make a good wife, for I had been the best of daughters. "But," he added, "there is plenty of time. George must have shown himself worthy before he can have my bonnie girl. I learn from Elisha (that was George's father) that he does not want to be a farmer, but to enter mercantile, or other business, in Toronto. Well, I have no particular objection, though I might have wished otherwise. His education will have been a good one; we will give him every chance. As I said before, he must prove himself, as both your parents and his always said, when talking about you two."

"Why, father, had you and uncle talked about us before?" I asked, with blushing surprise.

"Silly puss! Of course! Did you think we were all blind?"

II.

The college days were over, and George was home again. His career had not been brilliant, but he said he had worked incessantly, and if he had gained no honours, "Other fellows were the same. Where," he laughed, "would the value of honours be if every fellow got them, so that it is in the very nature of things, and a necessity of the case, that not every fellow should get them;"—a kind of logic that did not satisfy me; but then he spoke with such a breezy cheerfulness, and so handsome a face was smiling at me, that how could I question a word he said? Let me sketch him—a tall, athletic figure, active as a panther; a fair complexion; clear cut features of the true Saxon mould, blue eyes, bright and laughing; short curly hair, soft as silk; a voice full of music, now low and tender and now thrilling with trumpet-like tones. I thought him like Hereward the Saxon, or any such hero. And I was proud of him—indeed and indeed, I was.

But I must not linger over this part of my life. It is enough to say that George's departure for Toronto was soon after arranged, and a vacancy was made for him in the commission house of — & Co., where he was to learn their trade and the art and mystery of getting rich. We parted bravely as we could, with many protestations and promises to write often, and "Never, never forget." We should be able to meet but seldom; travelling in those days was not what it is now, and "business, George,

business," was what father and uncle said to him.

And time passed on.

I wrote often to my dear one, and he, though less frequently to me. I had little to say in my letters really, but I filled them with loving nonsense. He at first used to speak of many things—the city, the firm, the store, his associates, his boarding-house and its people, and the few amusements, the theatre, for instance, for which he found time. They were pleasant letters, and I used to think, from what I had read of published correspondence, not without a certain degree of literary merit. It was not long, however, before a change of tone that I cannot describe was perceptible in them. They were not less affectionate, but there was something about them I could not fathom. In later times I should have called them "fast," not, I mean, directly, or in form of expression, but instinctively I gathered that the social atmosphere surrounding him had changed, and not for the better. Especially I noted that though at first he used to explain what church he had attended, what lecture heard, or what book read, he ceased to allude to these, and spoke instead of pleasure excursions, young men's parties, and various amusements that were certainly not in vogue in our quiet neighbourhood. Puzzled, though we were, we all looked forward with great expectation to his first visit, I most of all, as was natural.

Among the persons mentioned in George's letters now and then, was a Robert Seymour, a clerk in the same store, a fellow-boarder, and apparently a frequent companion, though, as George wrote, he was not the brightest, cleverest, or liveliest person to "get along with." I could discern in the chance allusions to Mr. Seymour that the latter had impressed him with a feeling of respect. "Bob would not go with us," he said in one of his letters, "and when I got home at two o'clock in the morning his solemn phiz made me laugh, though I must own I felt ashamed of myself." On other occasions his serious friend appeared to have admonished him, not altogether to his gratification. I often caught myself wondering what sort of person this Robert was. That he was a true and sensible friend, at all events, I was sure; and I longed for an opportunity to question him about our darling. It came in due course, for, on a hint I gave, George invited him to join him on his first visit since he had been away—a long six months.

The expected day came at last, and I was up with the sun and merry as a lark. There were three hours to wait—the stage would be in by two in the afternoon, but my festive preparations were complete by ten o'clock in the forenoon. There were flowers festooned in the parlour, and indeed all over the house. I had made elaborate devices in the way of pastry and sweets, and as to my personal adornments—well, is not a little vanity natural to youth? Oh, the tedious hours of waiting; oh, the beating of my heart when the distant sound of wheels and hoofs grew nearer and nearer, until, turning a corner of the road, the stage was in sight, and I saw him waving his handkerchief as if he had gone frantic! I pass over the joy of that meeting, the handshaking and kisses, the tempest of affection at which a tall, grave young man was gazing silently. Then we suddenly remembered his existence, and in hearty fashion made him truly welcome. I see him now as I saw him then. Above the average height, and of dignified carriage. His countenance I have said was grave. The word is hardly the right one, for there was not a particle of sternness in the dark-complexioned face and deep brown eyes that were turned toward me. The expression rather was one of a capacity for affection too deep for mirth, having a seriousness all its own that attracted me irresistibly though I could not tell why. He and George seemed to be close friends and I was glad of it, especially as from the reliable character which Robert looked like possessing, he would I thought be a strong pillar for his more notable friend to lean upon in case of need. I felt confidence in his courage and his judgment. I knew, nay feared, that George might need such a mentor, for, in spite of my love for him, I could not shut my eyes to a certain weakness and thinness of fibre—that is the only way I can describe it—in his moral organization, and which, to me at least, became more and more apparent.

The visit was to be but for a few days, which we all took care should be well occupied, and we three were on the move continually. There was not a favourite haunt of my childhood that we did not show to Robert, not a pretty view he was not taken to see, not a friend to whom he was not introduced, while in the evenings with music and games and merriment we kept the two homes alive. It was a pleasant dream, too short alas! for, almost before we knew it, the day of parting had come, and once more silence, oppressive by contrast, fell upon us all at home.

III.

They, yes they, had gone, and I never felt so depressed in all my life. There was time now for solitary reflection, and I gradually found myself brooding over the realized past, and what was or was not to be in the future, over which a gray cloud of doubt and anxiety seemed to be gathering. I began to have forebodings. I caught myself making comparisons. Always, before, one figure had filled my thoughts, now there were two. Understand me distinctly—my love was undivided. But there was a subtle

influence in my mind which would increase in spite of me. I tried all I could; I prayed for help to throw off a feeling of distrust of George, and a tendency to view him at a disadvantage in regard to moral dignity and worth when compared to Mr. Seymour. I could not help it. I was very miserable. I knew that I loved George as much as ever, but alas! I could not esteem him as once I did. And yet if I had been asked to point out what particular circumstances had caused this change I could not have explained them, nor, indeed, myself.

Explained? Not then, but soon, ah! all too soon. It was about five months after that memorable visit that George's father came over to our house one morning, looking very anxious, I thought. He showed my father a letter, and they immediately went out together. What could be the matter? I had a presentiment of evil at once, and that in connection with George. I would certainly ask, if the truth were not told me at once. It was told me—I had no need to ask for it. "George has been writing to his father for money. He is in some difficulty it seems," said my father suddenly, as we sat by the fire that evening. "There is something more I fear that he keeps back."

"Does he give any reason? He was well provided with funds," said my mother.

"No; but we shall soon know," was the reply, given in a tone that seemed to forbid further conversation on the subject, which was dropped, though each of us was tortured by it evidently.

Somehow, I was not surprised, though my heart ached with an undefined pain, a strange dread. However, nothing more was said, and I suppose the money was sent; indeed I know it was. Not long afterwards a startling thing happened. A neighbour of ours who went occasionally to Toronto on business called, I fancy at my mother's request, at the store of Messrs. — to inquire for George, who, to his great surprise, was not there, nor had been for the past two months! Asking the reason, he was told that the firm knew of none; he had simply absented himself and they knew nothing whatever of where he was or what he was doing. They had sent to his boarding-house—he had left there in debt. Not even Robert Seymour had been able to find him, and there was no clue to what had become a most painful mystery which he had never ceased trying to unravel, but shrank from writing about, hoping as he had for light day after day. This was terrible news for all of us at home, and anxious were the consultations thereon. The ultimate result was that George's father set out himself to try and discover what was amiss. He was away over a week, and when he returned, alone, looked ten years older at least.

He had found his son, who had broken loose from all restraint and joined the society of a set of dissipated young men, who lived upon their wits, if living by fraud and violence could be so described. "I don't think he is a party to their crimes," said the old man in a broken voice. "but they fascinated him by what he thought good-fellowship, their gaiety and apparently merry life."

"Had he no excuse to offer?" asked my father.

"None. He professed great penitence, however; said he thought he must have been mad, and promised amendment. He even went with me to Messrs. — who, God bless them! took him back for one more trial. He assured me, further, upon his honour, that he would always be open with Mr. Seymour, who on his part pledged himself to look after him, and report to me faithfully. But I fear, yes Mary dear, I shudder at, what may yet be in store for him and all of us."

Bitter thoughts by day, and through long, sleepless nights henceforth for me. My idol was shattered and lay in the dust. I have heard and read often of homes desolated, of hearts broken, of utter misery, begun just in this way. The self-confident man, the pleasant fellow, wrecked by his own popularity; small indulgences leading him soon to excess, and finally the human being, born to responsibility, trusted by his Maker with many talents, losing the very semblance of manhood, and dragging all who clung to him into the mire. Still I hoped and prayed for the best. Surely the bright youth to whom I had given my heart was not destined for a fate like this! Surely his penitence must be sincere, his resolutions steadfast! God grant they might! And, truly, there was a gleam of hope, for he wrote several times during the next few months, and nearly if not quite in his old cheerful manner. We all gained courage, and said to each other, "George is reformed." Robert Seymour, too, gave us cheering accounts, and once more happiness dawned upon the two homesteads.

IV.

No! For suddenly the sky grew black, and we were plunged into the deepest grief. George had again thrown himself into the vortex that had drawn him under before, and when a letter came from the firm, and another from Robert, neither of which was I allowed to see, I knew that all was over. I pass over the days of agony, of tortured thought, which led to a great resolve. What if I, who had promised to be his wife should try to save him? Perhaps he will listen to me. I might be able to bring him away from the moral pestilence which had seized upon him. When I spoke of this to my mother, as I did before mentioning it to anyone else of course, she shuddered at the idea. "There is nothing