THE
Athens Reporter
IS ISSUED EVERY
TUESDAY AFTERNOON
—BY—
B. LOVERIN
EDITOR AND PROPRIETOR

SUBSCRIPTION
$1.00 PER YEAR IN ADVANCE, OR
$1.25 IF NOT PAID IN THREE MONTHS.

☞ No paper will be stopped until all arrears are paid except at the option of the publisher. A post office notice to discontinue is not sufficient, unless settlement to date has been made.

ADVERTISING
Business notices in local or news column, 10c. per line for first insertion and five cents per line for each subsequent insertion.
Professional Cards, 6 lines or under, per year, $5.00; over 6 and under 12 lines, $4.00.
Legal advertisements, 8c. per line for first insertion and 2c. per line for each subsequent insertion.
A liberal discount for contract advertisements.

Advertisements sent without written instructions will be inserted until forbidden and charged full time
All advertisements measured by a scale of solid nonpareil—12 lines to the inch.

A Terrible Secret was commenced in the issue of Sept. 4. Back numbers containing the chapters to date can be obtained at this office. New subscribers who wish will be supplied with this story from commencement.

A TERRIBLE SECRET.

subject of the late Thomas Moore and his melodies. But the young baronet suddenly interposed.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Stuart," he began hastily, and in a somewhat nervous voice; but there is a subject very near to my heart on which I should like to speak to you this evening."

Trix sat straight up in the stern of the boat, as if she had been galvanized. Her heart gave one great ecstatic thump. "Oh," thought Miss Stuart, "he's going to pop! He's going to pop, as sure as I live!"

There was a pause—unspeakably painful to Miss Stuart. "Yes, Sir Victor," she faltered in her most dulcet and encouraging accents.

"I had made up my mind not to speak of it at all," went on Sir Victor, looking embarrassed and rather at a loss for words, "until we reached England. I don't wish to be premature. I—I dread a refusal so unspeakably, that I almost fear to speak at at all."

"Good gracious me!" (this is what she thought) "why don't he speak out, and not go beating about the bush in this ridiculous manner! What's he afraid of? Refusal, indeed! Stuff and nonsense!"

"It is only of late," pursued Sir Victor Catheron, "that I have quite realized my own feelings, and then when I saw the attention paid by another, it was my jealousy first taught me that I loved."

"He means Captain Hammond," thought Trixy; "he's jealous of him, as sure as a gun. How lucky we met him at Macroom."

"And yet," again resumed the baronet, with a faint smile, "I don't quite despair. I am sure, Miss Stuart, I have no real cause."

"No-o-o, I think not," faltered Miss Stuart.

"And when I address myself to your father and mother—as I shall very soon—you think, Miss Stuart, they will also favor my suit?"

"They favor his suit?" thought Trix, "good Heaven above! was ever earthly modesty like this young man's?" But aloud, still in the trembling tones befitting the occasion, "I—think so—I know so, Sir Victor. It will be only too much honor, I'm sure."

"And—oh, Miss Stewart—Beatrix—if you will allow me to call you so—you think that when I speak—when I ask—I will be accepted?"

"He's a fool!" thought Beatrix, with an inward burst. "A bashful, ridiculous fool! Why, in the name of all that's namby-pamby, doesn't he pop the question like a man, and have done with it? Bashfulness is all very well—nobody likes a little of it better than I do; but there is no use running it into the ground."

"You are silent," pursued Sir Victor. "Miss Stuart, it is not possible that I am too late, that there is a previous engagement?"

Miss Stuart straightened herself up, lifted her head, and smiled. She smiled in a way that would have driven a lover straight out of his senses.

"Call me Beatrix, Sir Victor; I like it best from my friends—from—from you. No, there is no previous engagement, and" (archly, this) "I am quite sure Sir Victor Catheron need never fear a refusal."

"Thanks." And precisely as another young gentleman was doing in the shadow of the "Tore," Sir Victor did in the shadow of the "Eagle's Nest." He lifted his fair companion's hand to his lips, and kissed it.

After that of course there was silence. Trixy's heart was full of joy—pure, unadulterated joy, to bursting. Oh, to be out of this, and able to tell pa and ma, and Charley, and Edith, and everybody! Lady Catheron! "Beatrix—Lady Catheron!" No—I can't describe Trixy's feelings. There are some joys too intense and too sacred for the Queen's English. She shut her eyes and drifted along in that blessed little boat in a speechless, ecstatic trance.

An hour later, and, as the clocks of Killarney were striking ten, Sir Victor Catheron helped Miss Stuart out of the boat, and handed her up—still silently—to the hotel. At the entrance he paused, and said the only disagreeable thing he had uttered to-night. "One last favor, Beatrix," taking her hand and gazing at her tenderly, "I must ask. Let what has passed between us remain between us for a few days longer. I had rather you did not speak of it even to your parents. My aunt, who has been more than a mother to me, is ignorant still of my feelings—it is her right that I inform her first. Only a few days more, and then all the world may know."

"Very well, Sir Victor," Beatrix answered demurely; "as you please, of course, I shan't speak to pa or ma. Good-night, Sir Victor, good night!"

May I tell it, Miss Stuart actually gave the baronet's hand a little squeeze? But were they not engaged lovers, or as good? and isn't it permitted engaged lovers to squeeze each other's right hands? So they parted. Sir Victor strolled away to smoke a cigar in the moonlight, and Miss Stuart, with a beautified face, swept upstairs. Lady Catheron, Lady Catheron! Oh, what would all Fifth Avenue say to this?

Sleep was out of the question—it was open to debate whether she would ever sleep again. She would go and see Edith. Yes, Edith and Charley had got home before her—she would go and see Edith.

She opened the door and went in with a swish of silk and patchouli. The candles were unlit.

"All in the dark, Dithy, and thinking by the sweet silver light of the moon? O Edie! isn't it just the heavenliest night?"

"Is that what you came in here to say, Miss Stuart?"

"Don't be impatient, there's a dear! I wanted to tell you how happy I am, and what a delicious—de-li-ci-ous," said Trix, dragging out the sweet syllables, "sail I've had. O Edie! how I enjoyed myself! Did you?"

"Immensely!" Edith answered, with brief bitterness, and something in her tone made Trixy look at her more closely.

"Why, Edith, I do believe you've been crying!"

"Crying! Bosh! I never cry. I'm stupid—I'm sleepy—my head aches. Excuse me, Trix, but I'm going to bed."

"Wait just one moment. O Edith," with a great burst, "I can't keep it! I'll die if I don't tell somebody. O Edith, Edith! wish me joy, Sir Victor has proposed!"

"Trix!"

She could just say that one word and then she sat dumb.

"O yes, Edith—out in the boat to-night. O Edith! I'm so happy—I want to jump—I want to dance—I feel wild with delight! Just think of it—think of it! Trixy Stuart will be My Lady Catheron!"

She turned of a dead white from brow to chin. She sat speechless with the shock—looking at Trixy—unable to speak or move.

"He's most awfully and aggravatingly modest," pursued Beatrix. "Couldn't say plump, like a man and brother, 'Trixy Stuart, will you marry me?' but beat about the bush, and talked of being refused, and fearing a rival, and speaking to ma and pa and Lady Helena when we got to England.

Edith burst out laughing. But somehow the laugh sounded unnatural, and her lips felt stiff and strange.

"You're as hoarse as a raven and as pale as a ghost," said Trix. "That's what comes of sitting in draughts, and looking at the moonshine. I'm awfully happy, Edith; and when I'm Lady Catheron, you shall come and live with me always—always you dear old darling, just like a sister."

She flung her arms around Edith's neck, and gave her a rapturous hug. Edith Darrell unclasped her arms and pushed her away.

"I'm tired, Trix; I'm cold." She shivered from head to foot. "I want to go to bed."

"But won't you say something, Dithy? Won't you wish me joy?"

"I—wish—you joy."

Her lips kept that strange feeling of stiffness—her face had lost every trace of color. Oh, to be alone and free from Trix!

"You say it as if you didn't mean it," said Trix indignantly, getting up and moving to the door. "You look half-frozen, and as white as a sheet. I should advise you to shut the window and go to bed."

She was gone. Edith drew a long breath—a long, tired, heavy sigh. So! that was over—and it was Trix, after all.

Trix after all! How strangely it sounded—it stunned her. Trix, after all, and she had made sure it was to be herself. He had looked at her, he had spoken to her, as he had never looked or spoken to Trix. His color had risen like a girl's at her coming—she had felt his heart bound as she leaned on his arm. And it was Trix, after all!

CHAPTER VI.

And after to-night we will all have a rest, thank Heaven! and my pilgrimage wil come to and end. A fortnight at Powyss Place before you go up to London, my dear Miss Stuart—not a day less."

Thus Lady Helena Powyss, eight days later, seated luxuriously in the first-class carriage, and flying along by express train between Dublin and Kingston, en route for Cheshire.

Captain Hammond was of the party still, and included in the invitation to Powyss Place. He sat between Lady Helena and Sir Victor now—Miss Stewart, in charming travelling costume, in the sunny seat near the window. On the opposite seat, at the extreme end, sat Edith Darrell, her eyes rivited upon the pages of a book.

Since that night in the boat Miss Stuart had quietly but resolutely taken entire possession of Sir Victor.

Before she left her room on the ensuing morning following that never-to-be-forgotten night, Edith had entered and taken Trix in her arms and kissed her.

"I was stupid and out of sorts last night, Trixy," she had said. "If I seemed churlish, I ask your pardon, dear, with all my heart. I was surprised—I don't mind owning that—and perhaps a little, just a little, envious. But all that is over now, and I do wish you joy and happiness from the bottom of my heart."

And she meant it. Against the baronet himself, she felt anger deep and strong still. How dared he seek her out as he had done, select her for his confidante, and look love in fifty different ways, when he meant to marry Trix? What a fool she might have made of herself had she been a whit less proud than she was. Since then she had avoided him; in no marked manner, perhaps, but she had avoided him. If he felt this avoidance, he showed no sign. Perhaps he thought Miss Stuart had dropped some hint—girls, despite their promises, have been known to do such things—and this change was becoming maidenly reserve. Trixy's unremitting attentions were sisterly, of course. He felt grateful accordingly, and strove to repay her in kind. One other thing he observed, too, and with great complacency—the friendship between Miss Darrell and her cousin Charley had come to an end. This was as it should be; certainly Beatrix must have dropped that very judicious hint.

Two carriages awaited them at the Chester station. Into one entered Mr. and Mrs. Stuart, Sir Victor, and Beatrix; into the other, Lady Helena, Edith, Charley, and Captain Hammond. They drove away through quiet, quaint Chester, "rare old city of Chester." Presently an endless stretch of ivied wall appears in view, inclosing a primeval forest, it seems to Edith; and Lady Helena sits up and rubs her eyes, and says it is Catheron Royals.

They emerge from the chill darkness of dawning day into a blaze of light—into a vast and stately entrance-hall. A long file of servants are drawn up to receive them. And "Welcome to Powyss Place," Lady Helena says with kind courtesy. "I can only wish your visit may be as pleasant to you as you made mine in New York."

Without changing their dresses they are ushered into a lofty and handsome dining-room. More brilliant lights, more silent, respectful servants, a round table luxuriously spread. They sit down; forget they are tired and sleepy; eat, drink, and are merry; and it is five before they were shown up to their rooms. Then, hasty disrobing, hasty lying down, and all are at peace in the land of dreams.

Next day, about noon, Miss Stuart, clicking along in her narrow-soled, high-heeled boots, over a polished oaken corridor, lost her footing, as might be imagined, and came down, with an unearthly screech, on one ankle. Sir Victor was first on the field, and in Sir Victor's arms Miss Stuart was lifted, and borne back to her room. Luckily it was near, or even Sir Victor's chivalry and muscular development would not have been equal to it, for Trix was a "fine woman." The ankle was bathed and bandaged, the invalid's breakfast brought up—everything done for her comfort that it was possible to do; and in the midst of their fussing, having cried a great deal, Miss Stuart suddenly dropped off to sleep. Edith came out of the room looking pale and tired. In the slippery passage she encountered Sir Victor waiting.

"I have waylaid you on purpose, Miss Darrell," he said, smiling, "lest you should meet with a mishap, too. A carpet shall be placed here immediately. You look pale—are you ill?"

"I feel well enough; nothing is ever the matter with me; but I am rather stupid. Stupidity," she said, with her old laugh, "is fast becoming my normal state."

"You will come with me for a walk, will you not?" he asked. "The park is very well worth seeing. To-morrow, Miss Stuart's sprain permitting, we shall all visit Catherine Royals. Do come, Miss Darrell; it will do you a world of good."

She hesitated a moment, then went. What difference did it make? Trix wouldn't be jealous now. What difference did anything make, for that matter? So they went on that fateful walk, that walk that was to be like no other in all Edith Darrell's life.

"This is the Lime Walk—the prettiest at Powyss Place, to my mind." This was the young baronet's first commonplace remark. "If you will ascend the eminence yonder, Miss Darrell, I think I can point out Catheron Royals; that is, if you think it worth the trouble."

It was all the same to Edith—the Lime Walk, the eminence, or any other part of the park. She took Sir Victor's arm, as he seemed to expect it, and went with him slowly up the elevation.

"It is a wonderfully pretty place," she said. "I should think you English people, whose ancestors, time out of mind, have lived and died here, would grow to love every ivy-clad stone, every brave old tree. If I were not an American girl, I would be an English miss."

She laughed and looked up at him, her spirits rising in the sunshine and the free, fresh air. His eyes were fixed upon her face—passionate admiration, passionate love, written in them far too plainly for any girl on earth not to read. And yet—he had proposed to Trix.

"You would?" he eagerly exclaimed. "Miss Darrell, do I understand you to say you could live in England all your life—give up America and your friends, and pass your life here?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"It would be no great sacrifice. Apart from my father there isn't a soul in all wide America I care a farthing for, and your English homes are very charming."

The last barrier broke down. He had not meant to speak—he had meant to be very prudent and formal—to tell Lady Helena first, to refer the matter to Mr. Stuart next. Now all prudence and formality were swept away. Her hands were in his—he was speaking with his whole heart in every word.

"Then stay and share an English home—share mine Edith, I love you—I have loved you, I think, since I saw you first. Will you be my wife?"

Alas for Trix!—that was Edith's first thought. To burst out laughing—that was Edith's first impulse. Not in triumph or exultation—just at this moment she felt neither—but at the awful blunder Trix had made; for Trix had made a blunder, that was clear as day, else Sir Victor Catheron had never said those words.

"I meant to have spoken to Lady Helena and Mr. Stuart first," Sir Victor went on; "but that is all over now. I can't wait longer; I must take my sentence from your lips. I love you! What more can I say? You are the first my lips have ever said it to—the first my heart has ever felt it for. Edith, tell me, may I hope?"

She stood silent. They were on the summit of the hill. Away, far off, she could see the waving trees and tall chimneys of a stately mansion—Catheron Royals, no doubt. It looked a very grand and noble place; it might be her home for life—she who, in one sense, was homeless. A baronet stood beside her, offering her rank and wealth—she, penniless, pedigreeless Edith Darrell! All the dreams of life were being realized, and in this hour she felt neither triumph nor elation. She stood and listened, the sunlight on her grave, beautiful face, with vague wonder at herself for her apathy.

"Edith!" he cried out, "don't tell me I am too late—that some one has been before me and won your heart. I couldn't bear it! Your cousin assured me that when I spoke the answer would be favorable. I spoke to her that night in Killarney—I did not mention your name, but she understood me immediately. I told her I meant to speak as soon as we reached England. I asked her if she thought there was hope for me, and she——"

The passionate eagerness, the passionate love and fear within him checked his words suddenly. He stopped for a moment and turned away.

"O Trixy! Trixy!" was Edith's thought; and ridiculous and out of place as the emotion was, her only desire still was an almost uncontrollable desire to laugh outright. What a horrible—what an unheard-of blunder the child had made!

She stood tracing figures on the grass with the point of her parasol, feeling strangely apathetic still. If her life had depended on it, she could hardly have accepted Sir Victor then. By and by she might feel half wild with exultation—not now.

He waited for the answer that did not come. Then he turned from her, pale with despair.

"I see how it is," he said, trying, not quite successfully, to steady his voice; "I am too late. You love your cousin, and are engaged to him. I feared it all along."

The brown starry eyes, lifted slowly from the grass and looked at him.

"My cousin? You mistake, Sir Victor; I am engaged to no one. I"—she set her lips suddenly and looked away at the trees and the turrents of Catheron Royals, shining in the brilliant sun—"I love no one."

"No one, Edith! Not even me?"

"Not even you, Sir Victor. How could I? Why should I? I never dreamed of this."