

# SIDNEY'S LOVE AFFAIR.

BY WALTON S. SMITH.

## PART I.—ON THE RIVER.



T was a hot day in August, and the scene was in Canada. Let it suffice that this story is of our country, and that the principal characters are compatriots. Demand not, I beg, that I speak of time or place. My doing so may involve me

in difficulties, that, being of a prudent and timorous disposition, I would fain avoid. I have no wish to be waited upon by a score of outraged young people come to ask with blood in their eyes—

"Do you mean any of us, when you write of such and such an one?"

Therefore, I repeat, it was a hot August day, and the scene was in Canada. And I wish to introduce two of my characters. That solemn, ugly youth, with the large, dreamy eyes and fat face, is my hero, Sidney March. He was in the stern of a trim little skiff, drinking deep of the peace and brightness of his surroundings, with calm enjoyment.

There was a strong poetic strain in my hero's composite nature. The same was manifested, for the most part, in fantastic utterance. Those who did not know him well put him down as an oddity. Those who knew him better declared, with conviction, that he *was* an oddity. The world's opinion is usually correct in the main, and, to save time, it will be as well to re-echo it. Therefore Sidney March must be an oddity. When he was questioned on the subject, he sighed, and declared it was always the fate of great minds to be misunderstood. And that was his sole protest against the popular voice.

As he lay back in his cushioned seat, there was, as has been said, an expression of dreamy content on his face, and there was that in the look that instinctively made the beholder inclined to laugh. Yet he was influenced strongly by the sweetest and most ennobling feeling known to man! For his very soul expanded to the touch of nature, and was lifted up by the same. That his features took not the softened dignity that came to others on such occasions was surely not his fault. He could not be other than as God made him. It was his misfortune that the world looked upon him as a fantastic trifle. He was philosophical, and bowed submissively to the mundane view. His ready flow of language, his soul's quick response to all the finer influences, and his grotesque appearance, conspired against him. Men said smiling—"Behold the trifle!" when my hero did but act as his nature urged. Frank Merton, the athlete, the man of bone and brawn, was at the oars. He pulled along with steady, sweeping strokes, each movement of his figure showing the pliant muscles of his arms and chest. His sunny hair fell in some disorder over his brow, and, for a wonder, his face was grave. When Frank did not smile, he was beautiful as an ancient statue. Ordinarily though, the classic outline of his face was marred by an expansive grin.

At the present moment, however, he was by no means the least pleasing part of the whole in which the æsthetic Mr. March found the fullness of content.

"Frank," he said, breaking off from a long re-

verie, "you are positively the most disappointing person I know. To look at you now, one might well imagine you a youth of superior parts. But you are not."

Frank grinned at this, thereby instantly destroying the effect his gravity had fostered.

The soul of his friend waxed wroth. "I never could understand how I came to associate with you!" he declared disgustedly. "Your regard for me is natural, it is in accordance with the universal scheme—mediocrity always looks up to, and admires genius. But, that I should think well of you, is something I cannot reconcile to reason. It is a freak of the mind beyond all definition."

"Well you see, Sid., old man, your mind is generally acknowledged to be a freak," exclaimed Frank imperturbably.

Sidney was silenced; he turned again to admiring the beauty of their surroundings. And he mused, in an aimless fashion, on the emptiness of things. "Here is Frank now," he thought, "a perfect specimen of young manhood, a face like a god, and shoulders like a barn door, yet his mind soars not beyond a cigarette and a flirtation with some insipid Miss who has no mind at all, and therefore cannot soar. Frank never reads, and he finds it a nuisance listening to talk that is not nonsense. Yet he is naturally bright, and will, I dare say, turn into a sensible pot-bellied merchant-prince in time. But what a life, and what a success! The sterner and better part of him put to heap up gold and then his leisure wasted in folly! Alack!"

Suddenly his thoughts were interrupted by the sight of a couple in a small skiff, a short distance ahead. Their course was in the same direction as he and his friend were taking, but their speed was much less. The oarsman, a broad shouldered, ruddy faced young fellow dressed in white flannels, was evidently in no great hurry. He dipped his oars mechanically in the water, and the light skiff responded; but evidently he had no direct object in view—nothing that required speed at least. And, as he worked listlessly, he gazed intently at his companion. It was the latter that attracted Mr. March's attention too; he also eyed her curiously.

A young girl it was. She sat in the stern. She was clad in a cool white dress, and on her head was a broad straw sunshade; and, over all, she held a gay-coloured parasol to keep off the glare. It was the graceful pose of her figure that struck Sidney most. She was leaning slightly to the left, her head cast down, watching the clear water surge up and curl lovingly about her rounded arm. My hero was interested; he manœuvred the helm so as to pass near enough to obtain a good look at this very attractive damsel. At the same time he said *sotto voce* to Frank:

"Youth and love; the ardent boy and the coy maiden now appear. Gaze upon them."

Frank smiled comprehensively, and put the least bit more strength into his stroke. As yet the tableau was invisible to him, and he wished, with idle curiosity, to have a view of it in his turn.

As they came close astern, the young man looked up and regarded them carelessly; but the maiden did not move. Still her head was bent low, and her arm remained with the water rippling about it.

And Sidney, as he marked anew the unstudied elegance that was there, almost hoped she would not stir. When they came abreast, Frank turned, and eyed her with some appreciation. And, at the same time, the girl became aware of their presence. She raised her head and peered shyly at them from beneath her sunshade. Only a brief glance from a pair of soft eyes, a vague impression of a beautiful, sad young face, and the head was lowered again, the face hidden from view by the broad brimmed hat! And yet, both those young men were unspeakably moved. There was in that momentary flash a strange inexplicable influence with which both their beings were in sympathy. Ah there is that in a chance look, and in the roll of a bright eye that has, ere now, made history tell of brave deeds! Ay, and caused the very thrones of great monarchs to totter and fall. And still they tell us woman has no part to play in affairs! Ah well! this tale treats not of the affairs of nations. It does but relate briefly an insignificant episode in the life of an insignificant person whose place in the history of his time is like unto that occupied by an atom in a great swarm.

Sidney felt his heart beat, and instinctively it came to him that life had unutterable joys. And when that miserable sunshade hid the girl's face, it was as if the darkness had come upon him suddenly.

Frank murmured "Great Scott!" and in confusion spooned up some particles of water into his friend's lap. The fact that the latter failed to protest loudly at the bungling stroke, was in itself significant.

"I have an idea!" quoth Frank suddenly after a long long silence.

Sidney, who had been gazing vacantly skyward, roused himself at this and eyed his friend critically. And gradually the analysis in his look changed to one of distrust.

"Keep it in," he advised. "Let it mature. Your ideas are so horribly crude."

"Bosh! Listen; we will time ourselves to call at Mrs. Peyton's about five o'clock. She is sure to have a number of people on the lawn playing."

"Tea, tennis and talk!" broke in Sidney with emphatic scorn. "And that is the great idea—oh Frank, Frank!—and in this weather too! Sir, if you were not such a hulking mass of bone and muscle, I would throw you overboard."

"Hear me out will you?" said Frank laughing. "It will be a fine, moonlight night. Mrs. Peyton is sure to ask us to stop for tea—if she does not we can invite ourselves; at least you can. And the row back by moonlight will be splendid."

Sidney's outraged crest took a more mollified turn. "Not half a bad notion," he said hesitatingly. And then he added still more cheerfully—

"Mrs. P. does give a good meal. But," and he settled himself back in the cushions comfortably, "the river is preferable to doing the polite in the garden. I move in amendment that we call in at six o'clock and demand a meal. We can remain till ten if we like, you know. And, as I said before, she does keep a well stocked larder." And he smacked his lips significantly, eying his friend the while with a questioning look.

"Ay!" quoth Frank dryly, in response to the last speech, "and, strange to say, she is pleased to