

THE EVENING GAZETTE, ST. JOHN, N. B.

A WOMAN'S LOVE.

A CHRISTMAS STORY.

Which Commences in Australia and ends in St. John.
BY BREFFULCUS.

CHAPTER I.

"Ah me! how long! how long! Another Christmas come and my darling still away. No money to buy her a ticket, no, not a cent. Debt upon me who never knew what it was to want before, and the worst fate of all, 2000 miles between my dear Louise and me!"

Such were the words, quietly but sadly, murmured by a young and handsome man as he sat on a cliff of rock on the bay shore, one evening in the end of November, two years ago. It was five o'clock and the sun had wheeled round in the horizon to the west. The day had been frosty, but the sun's brilliancy and dusk year, had warmed the atmosphere and cast a mellow glow over the sleeping waters of our lovely harbor. There he sat like a lonely exile, watching the line of light that played across the bosom of the deep, as if following it in spirit to his native land. But it did not lead him quite so far. Betwixt it and him was an object far dearer to his heart just now—his one treasure upon earth, his only joy in life, his young wife. He had married her the September of '87, in Melbourne, Australia. Nineteen years old, a very picture of loveliness, accomplished in music and literature, he had won her heart from many suitors. Yet he was not known to her long. A young Irishman of good family, fresh from the Dublin University, patriotic and dashing; he was a splendid specimen of the present generation of his native Erin, and soon attracted towards him the daughter of an Irish mother and an American father, born on Australian soil. No fortune but his talents and virtuous education, her mother opposed the intended union, but all in vain, for Louise was not the girl to reject the man she admired, penniless though he might be, for one whose wealth was his only recommendation.

Months passed and Louise Hardiman was still unmarried. A certain Mr. Merton continued to visit Mrs. Hardiman's family, for Fred Hardiman and he were intimate companions, school-mates a few years ago, and now went shooting and hunting together. Mr. Merton had wealth, was a good shot, could tell a good tale, give a good laugh, and he was the man. Fred's own heart *Pures om portus congruatur* in the old adage, and never did it appear more true than in this case. The young men were inseparably together at clubs, dances, reading rooms, lectures, tea parties, and so on. For more than two years had Mr. Merton been paying his attentions to Louise Hardiman and though she treated him with courtesy for her brother's sake, she never really could like him as much as she desired. Still there were times when she felt as if she could love him, he was so like her brother in his manners and by his unnatural though acquired habits of criticism, often drew from her an unwilling approval in the form of a laugh. Her mother would not oppose this union and well Louise knew it, for Mrs. Hardiman doted on her little daughter whom he liked, had her approval. At this time there was yet no one on the scene whose character Louise might contrast with that of Mr. Merton where by she might be able to draw the line of distinction between genuine and counterfeit worth. Being about the same age, Louise sought her acquaintance and rose in her estimation each one higher than another, leaving Mr. Merton at the lowest degree of comparison. Yet strange to say, for so it sometimes is, he was the very one who was most content of success and persistent in his suit. He had money and his highest ideal of woman's fidelity was, that she could love him best who could most afford to deck her in all the varying fashions of the hour. And the Australian sunshine without doubt has much to do in making his fair daughters love the goodness of a flash dress. But Mr. Merton had not for the first time in his life, mistakes and misinterpreted the feelings and tastes of the object of his suit. She had penetrated his judgments, had scented him by many excellent and delightful to indulge his vanity at his own cost. It was useless to teach him by any other methods than those of experience and his wisdom, she saw, was never innate but only to be acquired. One of those many suitors she had long concluded would be a worthy match for her. Like herself he possessed, she thought many tastes so natural that they ruled him in all his actions, and many attractions of head and heart that were common to her as well. Tall, gentlemanly, dignified, he knew himself with grace on all occasions, but it was painfully apparent that a vein of pride permeated and disfigured his many other wise excellent qualities. Yet might the wife's amiable character, good judgment and gentle rebukes, be successful in wiping the stain away, and then would he not be simply perfect. So she had long thought within herself till one afternoon crossing the street in front of her own door one of those pleasing incidents of a life time formed an item in the book of her existence.

For three days it had been raining as only those in Australia know how it can rain there from time to time. Floods literally swept along the streets of Melbourne carrying everything before them as high as the door steps of the houses of the great. Only the most urgent business could drag people from their homes for forty eight hours past, but to-day being the third, the down pour had slackened changing into a mere mist in the afternoon, through which the brilliant sunshine glowed and the only remnant of the storm remaining on the pavements, was the deep slush accumulated here and there.

Louise Hardiman had been on an urgent call to the post-office and returning, about to cross the street to her door, she found herself barred by the deep deposit of mire along her path. Suddenly there came along a young man, who, perceiving her difficulty immediately requested her to wait "a moment." In four minutes he was back from a neighboring lumber yard, a large plank on his shoulder which he placed across the street to reach the door steps, and taking the fair girl by the hand, guided her cleanly to the opposite side. She bowed her gratitude and smilingly looked him in the face for an instant during which he raised his hat, said "the pleasure infinitely outweighed the trouble" and turning aside looked at the plank sunk in the slush. After a minute's pause his dress coat was thrown off and placed on the iron railing in front of the house, his hands delicate and round went into the gutters, the board was uplifted again and returned to its place in the lumber yard. Once more he came back for his coat but this time to have a better look at his admirer—the girl to whom he had just rendered a trivial service. What a little thing will sometimes stir up the flame of love in our hearts and how small a trifle will extinguish again the bright bubble so lately floating on the surface.

Louise Hardiman was at the door when Edwin Milligan returned and requested him in vain to take his hands, he politely declined to give her the trouble, saying he was at present staying at the Victoria hotel quite congenial, dobed his hat again and hurried away. The fair enchanted went in, her cheeks glowing as she mounted the doorsteps, twitted merrily by her brother, Julia her cousin and Mr. Merton, over what they were pleased to term, her disappointment.

Two months passed and she had not once again laid eyes on her friendly gallant. Many a time when passing on the side walk the smoking room of the Victoria hotel, did she shyly glance through the window to catch his eye, but in vain. His features however were sculptured in her heart, the sweet musical accents of the Dublin English, still rang in her ears, his tall supple figure floated before her in the shadows, and in her dreams he seemed to be the one man in all the world whose image she could not tear from her soul. Yet these were only the shadows; the reality was a stances had gone. Was there any hope that she might ever see him again? She may or she may not, it was difficult to tell. But why did she desire it? What did she know about him more than that he had done for her that day what many another man would have done, even Mr. Merton himself. And besides, why did he seem to have so little desire to make her acquaintance? Surely she must try and at once what time and distance will do for dreams he seemed to be the one man her only kindness as a lesson to do likewise to others. She struggled to do so, but in vain. An indefinable something about him seemed to have made a lasting impression on her heart and his image over rose before her eyes with a vividness that could not be more distinct. "What a mystery is the human heart," she often thought to herself during these moments of remembering him. "And who can regulate this flame of affection when once it is lit? Does it not seem as if there is a magnet of attraction between this strange young man and herself whether mutual or not I can't tell. Oh would that we met once more!" and she threw on the table "Robert Elmer" which she had been reading, or trying to read, for her mind wandered from every line to another than Robert, his equal in philanthropy and his superior in physical charms.

CHAPTER II.

It is the evening of the 2nd of September, 1887. A coach rides up to the door of the personage of the Rev. Mr. Waller in the Rangata valley, Victoria, Australia. A young lady alights and is welcomed by a thousand cold white faces in page with a thousand cold white faces in genuine Irish fashion. They talk together for some moments, her baggage is hurried in and in its bulky appearance she evidently indicates that she intends to remain for some time. Indeed so it was, for Mr. Waller had some weeks before given her a pressing invitation to come on her usual annual visit during that delightful month in the Australian vale whose come over me. Don't I imagine it is

any foolish sentimentality or love fit; it is not; and yet I can't well say what, or define it.

The young gentleman visitor of whom you spoke, will, I fear, not find me as agreeable as I would wish, so pray, you must excuse me to him if I be rude. His poem in the "Argus" are my delightful reading; why does he not write over his own name that people might be able to make his acquaintance? I know one girl that loves the poet through the poems.

Expect me next week.

Your fond Louise

Three days bring her to next week, and the fourth day sees her arrived at the parsonage. After herself Mr. Waller and wife had talked for some time about the friends in Melbourne, they turned the conversation on this young gentleman visitor. He was an Irishman from the same old soil as Mr. Waller himself, a gentleman in the true sense, a poet, handsome, warm hearted like his countrymen and like them too, rashly braved "What said she? Walker was elegant in his eulogy. 'It's not because he's my cousin I say it, nor because he's a son of the Emerald Isle, but he is in truth what I believe him to be, the purest, noblest, bravest young man in this country today and that's saying a great deal. The Irish youth of today are not what they were when I was a boy. Then slavery was engendered into the peasantry of the soil; the bone and sinew of the land were sown in servility by their unfortunate fathers, who sowed and lifted their hats at the scowl of tyrant land agents. May heaven protect the man who has broken the chains of slavery which fettered my countrymen so long."

"Pray, who is that man?" said Louise. "Parrell, I suppose."

"Yes, he surely, chiefest of all, and O'Connell before him, Parrell thought he was. How proud is it not for us to know that the Protestant sons of Ireland are they who have always fought for her freedom most. Does not this alone prove to us that the very spirit of liberty dwells in the heart of Protestantism?"

And here, today, sweet girl, you shall see for yourself an illustration instance of what freedom can do to make a perfect man, even in a land where the sun of liberty had but just touched her with a single ray."

"Where is he?" broke in Louise. "You only excite desire to see him."

"He's in the garden, reading, and I shall go and fetch him," jumping from his chair.

Mr. Waller was a man whom the pure air of colonial liberty had evidently made a "Horse Rider." In the days of his education, Irish Protestant clergymen were loyalists of a very stern type. But those prejudices had long since evaporated and he was now a man of liberal views and he for some years past had grown proud of his Protestant countrymen, Isaac Butt and Parnell. Never, however, did he feel more elated over his opinions and feelings concerning what freedom would do for his native land, than since the arrival of this young man who had not been born when he left the old soil.

Louise and Mrs. Waller are still chatting in the little parlor, when suddenly the folding doors are drawn aside and in comes Mr. Waller with a tall, graceful young man leaning on his left arm, his finely shaped head erect between square, broad shoulders, slightly thrown back, and a very man of look, dark hair, brown hair, giving him all the appearance of a kingly personage. There was a smile on his cleanly shaven, handsome face, when Mr. Waller introduced him as his cousin and the author of the "Argus" poems, to which he had referred in his letters. Louise rises and greets him with a friendly emotion. Edwin bows, colors slightly, and a look of surprise passes over his face.

"My gallant friend, the object of my dreams and subject of my thoughts," cried Louise, recovering herself, and extending to him her hand, while Mr. and Mrs. Waller are left in wondering amazement. Edwin shook the outstretched hand warmly, remarking, "When I first met you, Miss Hardiman, it was under very different circumstances, was it not?"

"Very, indeed," was the brief response. "What?" and Mr. Waller, astonished, ment written on his face, "can it be possible that two, who, for life were separated by the ocean till a few weeks ago, could have met before? Imagination, girl; you are mistaken, surely; and you, Edwin, how poets do dream and fancy."

Dear Cousin, said he, leaping a big laugh, turning towards Mrs. Waller, who remained mutely divining the mystery that seemed to hang around the whole affair.

"It is so, however," returned Edwin. "And I am happy to affirm it," said Louise, her eyes sparkling with joy, and to think that I have once more met the man who so impressed me with his unselfish kindness and bearing when I least expected it, that I have not since been wholly able to forget him for a single day."

"Ha! Ha!" laughed the rector, "I see I feel this is surely the same old story, love at first sight. Louise, colored deeply and then her rev. cousin added, so to distract attention, "Well I'm glad to know it. But how, for I can't forgive all that I had been saying to you a while ago."

"Miss Hardiman," interrupted "I did for you only what, in the circumstances, I would have done for any

body, but to-night is the proudest night of my life to think that I have done it for one esteemed by my cousin."

"Cousin," repeated the rector, "we are all cousins. She and you are blood relations of mine and yet, I, as far as I know, am the only connecting link between you both."

"And a golden one it is," said his wife laughing a laugh that seemed to come like a burst of music from her heart. Louise and Edwin also laughed and looked again and again at each other while Mr. Waller sat down and seemed the happiest man living.

The whole story of the first and accidental meeting of Louise and Edwin was now related by the latter with an enthusiasm and yet a modesty that made him the idol of the three listeners. Louise had at last discovered that it was possible for one man to occupy every inch of space in a girl's heart, to be the centre of all her affections and absorb all her thoughts. And Edwin found for the first time that a man must love when the proper object crosses his path. Never

glitten Louise, the moral force of that definition of Ariosto when he wrote the words "beauty is the truth unbelieved."

Mr. Hardiman was a genuine girl. Truth, modesty, self-respect and goodness were on every line of her handsome face. When she spoke she meant what she said, and when she smiled it was the light of her soul, the sweetness of her nature that beamed on her countenance. Her cousin, who had known her since she was a little girl, now loved and they knew it; their hearts beat responsive and they both felt the shock. Even the rector and his wife could divine the feeling and encouraged it, for they had long loved the girl and admired the late arrival from their fatherland. There seemed a something like destiny about the meeting and the rev. gentleman in his religious zeal was not slow to suggest the thought.

"Don't you think there's a divinity smiling on and approving this unexpected greeting here to night?" he said, turning to Edwin and Louise who now sat close to each other opposite him.

"I hope so," returned Edwin, "and that cousin never made the steps which may never be denied us."

Louise blushed and nervously seemed as if she would answer, "Amen."

"And he showered on you not a part but together," added the rector with a cunning smile and a sly glance toward Louise.

Edwin looked at the girl by his side as if soliciting an answering remark, but she merely smiled and gave a sort of an indefinite nod. Again the lovers glanced at each other for a moment, and still there was a pause. Edwin rises from his seat, extends manfully his right hand to the girl, and she, with a look of surprise, yess, Miss Hardiman!" he uttered emphatically, who extending in turn her hand to him, he felt more elated over his opinions and feelings concerning what freedom would do for his native land, than since the arrival of this young man who had not been born when he left the old soil.

Three weeks later she broke the news of her engagement to her mother, who, learning that he was without means, refused her assent to a union with poverty reminding her in her native nation that poverty never made the poet.

"No money alone a happy home," returned Louise, pained by her mother's refusal.

"Oh!" answered her mother, "the old story!" loved you by your girls."

"And what is marriage without it?" returned Louise, "A mockery, a delusion, a slavery. May heaven defend me from such a union."

"You are mistaken, surely; and you, Edwin, how poets do dream and fancy."

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CHAPTER III.

Ten days after the time the conversation recorded in our last chapter took place, Edwin Milligan and Louise Hardiman were made man and wife in the little rectory parlor where they were first formally introduced by the rev. occupant. A few friends were present and the mainly bearing of the bridegroom and unmarried beauty of the bride were the topic of general comment. After a sumptuous repast aimed much pleasant and congratulations, the happy couple returned to Melbourne to live for some time with the bride's mother. Mr. Merton was not at the wedding nor did he call to congratulate them. Others who had been the constant friends of Louise and her companions in many a fête day, were not able to see them for their forgetfulness or indifference. She met them in the street from time to time, but they seemed to avoid her. What can be the matter she thought to herself surely I have done nothing to offend them. As for the wedding they knew it was private, confined entirely to a few friends of Mr. Waller's who lived in the rectory and not a single card issued to any one in Melbourne. It cannot be jealousy, no, and then what just to think of even Fanny Wetmore who hopes one day to be my brother's wife, even she to snub me as she does it more than I can account for. There must be some mystery at the bottom of it all. Is there any disgrace attaching and to whom? My husband or myself? It is not possible surely that I have married a man who will be my shame. No I do not, never will believe it. And to tell my husband of my treatment from my former best friends, this may excite suspicion in his mind. But what can I do? Surely this is something. Ah, well, Heaven will defend the righteous.

These and like thoughts agitated her mind for many days till one evening her husband came home flushed and red. There was a scowl of vengeance in his face as he said in angry tones addressing himself to his mother.

"Merton is a scoundrel, I know it now and by all the strength that God has given me, I shall die or be avenged on his scoundrel. Ah, well, Heaven will defend the righteous."

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