

(For the CANADIAN ILLUSTRATED NEWS.)

## OLD JOSETTE.

She wanders here and there,  
With dull, unhappy air,  
As if life were but one grand regret;  
Course and faded is her gown,  
And her hands are hard and brown  
Toiling for her daily bread, poor Josette!

The fretful ills of life  
With her make constant strife—  
She was never known to conquer yet—  
And she wears friend and foe  
With her tongue's incessant flow,  
And her temper is not sweet, poor Josette!

Yet she is kind of heart,  
And takes in gentle part  
What an evil one could not forget;  
For along the village streets,  
The thoughtless one she meets  
Have their jest at crazy old Josette.

Ah, once Josette was young!  
The golden sunbeams clung  
To the tresses of their rosy pet;  
And the sky's serene blue  
Was not sweeter than the hue  
Of the shining eyes of P'tite Josette."

That poor old wrinkled face,  
With girlhood's laughing grace,  
Dimpled o'er from dawn till bright sunset,  
Not a bird-note ever rang,  
Clearer than the voice that sang  
The merry songs of young Josette.

Now oft she sighs and weeps,  
But in her heart she keeps  
A thought that comforts, even yet;  
Though weary, sad and old,  
In hunger oft, and cold,  
"Le bon Dieu est pour moi," says Josette,

And he will know his own;  
When grief and life are flown,  
Not a care or pain will he forget,  
And her years will fall away—  
—Fair and young, in the glad day,  
Will shine the face of "Old Josette!"

J. H. S. BUGEJA.

## THE LOST OPPORTUNITY.

"SISTER DORA, you are a simpleton! That girl of yours is clearly ruined by your own folly!" said Mr. Dorrington, a bachelor of some fifty years of age, as he watched a bright and lovely girl carelessly lounge from the room where they were sitting, some moments after the luncheon had been removed.

Mrs. Tremaine looked round from the letter she was reading in blank amazement.

"Really, brother, you are very odd!" she said, despairingly. "What can you wish or expect to be more beautiful, attractive in every respect, than Blanche! I am sure she is immensely admired! And see," she went on, "here is a proposal I have just received for her from a charming gentleman, who, I know, has been wishing for a long time to speak out openly, but has deferred doing so till he had a home to offer to her!"

Mr. Dorrington gave a slight grunt as he accepted the letter extended to him.

"It is all very well as to outside show, Dora," he returned, adjusting his glasses to read the epistle; "but it's not that which will make a woman worth having, or happy in herself. Blanche is incorrigibly idle, and, what is more, criminally unpunctual!"

"Criminally, brother! Surely, you use some very extraordinary expressions!" interrupted Mrs. Tremaine, her anger scarcely smothered under the fear of losing a rich brother's favour.

"Yes, sister, criminally!" resumed Mr. Dorrington; "for I call it a robbery to cheat others of their time, as well as a dangerous and fatal trespass on domestic peace and comfort. But, of course, it's your affair, and her future husband's. It will make very little difference to me!"

And the old bachelor applied himself to the perusal of the letter.

"Humph!" he commented, when it was fairly concluded; "I don't dislike the tone of this young fellow's epistle. There's some sense and manliness in it, though it's plain enough he has no great prospects to offer. Still, he speaks out; and, I should think, would have enough wits, seemingly, to push his way. Let me see—what's his name? Quentin Marsland. Yes, I rather incline favourably to his pretensions," continued the old gentleman, referring again to the important letter.

"He wishes to come and see you, brother," was Mrs. Tremaine's faltering suggestion.

"All right," he answered. "I don't object; only I've very little to say in the matter," was the rather gruff reply.

Mrs. Tremaine was fain to be satisfied with the permission, albeit rather ominously expressed, and a letter was sent off accordingly to the expectant lover.

It was some few days afterwards when Quentin Marsland and Blanche Tremaine were summoned to the library of the eccentric old bachelor, who had studiously avoided the slightest allusion, by word or act, to any concern he might be supposed to have in the betrothal of his orphan niece.

Indeed, he had been away part of the time that the lover had spent at Woodland's; and the mother and daughter privately hoped he had visited Shrewsbury on some legal business that would tell on the wedding arrangements of a presumed heiress of his wealth. And when, on the morning after his return, the lovers were sent for to his apartment, the hopes of all concerned flashed up into a yet brighter flame.

"I have sent for you, niece, and for you, Mr. Marsland," he began, "to make all as clear to you, with respect to my intentions and your prospects, as may lie in my power."

He paused.

"In the first place, I must inform you that

the fortune left to Blanche by her father is very small; but with the interest, and tolerably good management, it is worked up to some two thousand pounds, yielding little less than a hundred per annum." The bachelor looked from one to the other. "Now, as I understand that you, Mr. Marsland, are in receipt of two hundred a-year from the bank, in which you are tolerably certain to rise, I do not see that you need be at any difficulty as to the future, with ordinary economy and self-denial; but mark me, Blanche, nothing else can keep you out of debt and ruin, and I give you this warning to prevent any fatal mistakes on your part." Blanche winced. "If you are either, or both of you, afraid of the prospect, then there is yet time to draw back. Nay, hear me out," he went on; "it is only fair you should know what to expect from me, and I have to inform you, in the first place, that I am myself going to marry a woman who will in all respects, I believe, secure my comfort and happiness, though neither young nor pretty like my little niece"—this with a grave smile; "and what I propose to do, as my part of the business, is to furnish your house for you in a comfortable manner, and present you with a check for a hundred pounds as a start in housekeeping, besides which I will take the expenses of the wedding and trousseau on myself. So now you have all before you, and can make up your minds whether you will risk the prospect."

It was easy enough to predict the reply, and, to do Quentin justice, his thanks and his protestations were heartfelt and manly.

But perhaps a slight cloud did come over Blanche's lovely face, though she took care to repress every expression of her feelings, and it was only in private confabulation with her mother that the disappointment broke forth.

"Is it not provoking, mamma? I wonder who has got hold of my uncle. I can't think of any one—do you? And it is too bad I should be left unprovided for by him after all this time! And, of course, the artful woman will get all his money!"

"Let us hope not, my dear," replied the mother, condolingly. "In any case, you are as well out of the way; and you do love Quentin, you tell me, and he is really an exceedingly good-looking and gentlemanly young fellow. You will be very happy, I dare say, after all, Blanche, love."

"Oh, yes, of course; only I might have done better if I had thought I had not plenty of my own money," said the young lady. "But I do care for him, and I should be wretched without him, mamma; only it is horrid to have to be so careful, and to work for oneself, instead of having lots of servants. However, perhaps Quentin may get some wonderful luck, or uncle may leave us a fortune, after all; and it's too late to draw back," continued the young fiancée. "Yes, it will be jolly enough, I am sure! Uncle Bob's a nuisance, that's certain!"

But Uncle Bob was plastic as to trousseaus and wedding guests.

Never had slenderly dowered young lady such a tasteful, ample outfit; never did a bride look lovelier or happier than Blanche Tremaine, or receive the good wishes of more numerous guests on her wedding morn.

And Mr. Dorrington's own wedding, some two months afterwards, was simple and private in comparison with that of his modestly dowered niece.

"Really, Blanche, dear, I do think something might be done to make this room rather neater—I may say, more habitable," observed Quentin, gravely, looking round on the breakfast parlour before quitting it for his daily avocations. "Just look at that ragged chair-cover, and then the window curtains want rings sewn on; and the anti-macassars would be decidedly better out of the way, unless they could be kept rather cleaner," he went on, glancing round the apartment with an air rather of hopeless regret than of anger.

"You are so tiresome—always finding fault, Quentin!" was the fretful reply. "I'm sure it's more annoying to me than you to have things looking so shabby and no servants to attend to anything. I'm not used to working my fingers to the bone with parlour-maid's work; and if you wanted a wife like that you should not have married a girl brought up as a lady—nor a servant."

And Blanche returned to her perusal of the Court gossip in the morning paper.

Two years had not elapsed since their marriage, and Blanche had but too well justified her uncle's predictions.

Hopelessly untidy and unpunctual in her habits, now that she was thrown on her own resources, the handsome furniture and elegant trousseau with which the young couple had started in life were being rapidly ruined for want of ordinary care and attention.

Her husband did not fare better in his turn.

Buttonless shirts; late and comfortable breakfasts that often were useless meals for the master of the house, to whom in the early morning moments were precious; and dinners, whose ill-chosen and ill-dressed dishes were at once costly and unsavoury, were the experience of married life to Quentin Marsland.

And although his love for the fair young culprit did not decline, he yet could scarcely fail to mark her unblushing submission to these shortcomings, and sigh over the visions that had gilded his marriage day.

On the morning in question his temper had perhaps been severely tried by a long waiting for the breakfast meal, and one or two unlooked-for demands on his purse.

He went off without his accustomed kiss to the young wife.

And Blanche pouted in mingled resentment and grief at the omission.

Almost about the same hour a colloquy of a very different nature had taken place between a couple of even more recent bridal.

"If I have time, may I not call on your niece? They must think it unkind we have not been to see them for so long," asked Mrs. Dorrington of her husband, as they sat in the "Palace Hotel."

"If you will be at Paddington by three o'clock, you can do as you please," returned her husband. "You are one of the very few women whom I could trust; but you are always right—never in the way, nor out of the way," he added, with a look of tender pride that brought a happy smile to his wife's lips.

"Flatterer," she said, gaily, "you are bribing me to do my duty! Well, I will not try to forfeit your good opinion."

And quietly putting on her walking-dress, the pleasant-looking wife entered the brougham ordered for her, and set off on her various commissions.

"If you please, ma'am, Mrs. Dorrington," announced Blanche Marsland's servant-of-all-work to her young mistress; "and she is sorry she can't stay many minutes, ma'am."

Blanche rushed from the bed on which she was lying, to conceal the tears that would force their way, and began her toilette.

But again her unconquerable procrastination seized on her, to strengthen the untoward obstacles in her way.

The dress she had to put on lacked buttons; her hair had been carelessly arranged for the breakfast, and was certainly still more disordered now.

And, in short, on her tardy descent, only a card, and a brief apology on its space, greeted her eyes; and with a peevish surprise that people could be in such a hurry, she sat down to the piano, and began to sing.

"Blanche, what is the card? Has your aunt been here? How fortunate!" said the husband, as his eyes fell on the pasteboard.

"My uncle's wife came, but I did not see her; was dressing," she returned, rather sulkily.

"Blanche, you could not mean it—you are not so unfortunate?" he exclaimed.

"Why, pray?" she asked.

"Only that I have at this moment the chance of an excellent appointment that would much depend on your uncle's interest," he said; "and I actually have given him as a reference; and to-morrow morning I am to go for a personal interview with the gentleman in question!" he replied, angrily, "Woman, you will be my ruin!" he added, bitterly.

"I'm sure you have been mine! I could have done far better if I had never seen you!" she returned.

Quentin looked at her for a few minutes in stern, speechless indignation.

Then, without a word more, he rose from the table, pushed his plate to the opposite side, and rushing from the room, was soon out of the house.

Blanche heard the hall door slam behind him. Her heart beat throbbingly; she could have sobbed with mingled grief, and terror, and anger. But the latter prevailed.

She forced some spoonfuls of the untempting dish down her throat.

Then ringing the bell, she passed into another room while the maid cleared the table, and tried to employ herself; but in vain.

The hours lagged slowly on.

She sent the domestic to bed, and waited, till midnight sounded, for the truant. The next minute a staggering step mounted the stairs; the chamber door was abruptly forced open.

For the first time in her life, Blanche saw her husband in a state of intoxication, and, in horror and disgust, watched his attempts to find his way to bed; where, once safely landed, his heavy breathing proved him to have sunk in deep and hopeless slumber.

Blanche also slept at last; but her repose was fitful and broken, and she rose early, to escape, as it were, from the chamber that been the scene of degrading torture for her.

It was ten o'clock ere Quentin woke, in a confused state of consciousness.

"Blanche, where am I? What is the time?" he exclaimed, eagerly.

"You are at home, of course. It is ten o'clock—and no wonder, when you did not come home till past midnight, in that disgraceful state of inebriety!" she said, coldly.

"Ten!" he repeated, in a tone of anger. "And I was to be at Mr. Vavasour's ere half-past ten! What shall I do?"

"It is of no use, I imagine; but of course you must be as quick as you can," replied Blanche, coldly. "It is your own fault, so do not blame me," she added, angrily.

The husband did not pause for altercation; there was no time for such folly.

And he rapidly commenced his operations, in the faint hope that Mr. Vavasour might not be much more punctual than himself.

At length, the last processes were at hand.

"Blanche, a clean shirt!" he exclaimed, half-forgetting the coldness between them, in his haste.

"The wife carelessly obeyed."

It is your last; you have worn two this week, she said, half-throwing the garment on the bed, in stead of a more kindly mode of service.

Quentin hastily put it on.

An oath burst from his lips, as he tried to fasten it.

"As usual, no button! It is useless. I am ruined!" he exclaimed.

For once, Blanche quailed under the deep anger and terror that the words and look betrayed.

"Give it me; I will sew it on in an instant!" she said.

But the button had to be found; the thread was too coarse for the needle. Thus another delay occurred, and at least a quarter of an hour elapsed ere the matter was complete.

Quentin took no food ere he started. The cup of tea that was silently poured out was his sole refreshment.

And when he was gone, Blanche gazed round at the comfortless apartments in something like remorse, however resolutely repressed by pride and her fancied injuries.

"It was so stupid of him! He might at least remember what home he took me from, and my pretensions!" she murmured. "And then to make such a row about a button, and after his being in that disgraceful state!"

Blanche worked herself into a conviction of confirmed ill-usage ere the next weary hour had passed slowly away.

Another and another! Then there was a slow, heavy step came feebly up the steps; the key was put tremblingly in the door.

And, in another moment, Quentin staggered into the room, pale and agonized, as if his grief was too great to bear.

"Too late—too late, Blanche—you have ruined me!" he said, faintly.

And, with a hollow groan, he fell on the couch, with the blood welling from his nose and mouth; while a shrill scream of horror burst from his young wife's lips.

"Quentin, can you forgive me? I am so wretched—so cruel! I do not deserve it; but if it is possible—if you could have mercy on me—I have suffered so severely!" pleaded Blanche, as she knelt by the couch on which her husband lay, after the long and dangerous illness, that, for a time, seemed hopelessly to threaten his life.

The young husband gave a faint smile, as he as he feebly extended his hand to the weeping girl.

"Poor Blanche! I was wrong, and you are the sufferer!" he moaned; "but we will try to be happy, even in poverty."

"If my whole life can atone," she gasped, "it shall be freely given! Oh, Quentin, you are an angel to forgive such a thoughtless, selfish wretch!"

Perhaps the young pair had never shown more loving union than at that sad awakening to the truth of their position.

Certainly it was the beginning of a new life for Blanche.

The powers that she naturally possessed were called forth by the terrible shock she had undergone, and, even amidst great shortcomings and mistakes, she, by degrees, conquered the failings that had well-nigh made her a mourning, desolate widow.

There was, perforce, the self-denial and the restraint which Mr. Dorrington had predicted; but even amidst the frugal living and the drawbacks of Quentin's long expensive illness, there was peace and happiness in the little abode.

An air of neatness, even refinement, pervaded the *entourage*; while Blanche's dresses had a scrupulous simplicity and taste, that was, in itself, elegance. Never had Quentin thought her so lovely in their early courtship as now; and when a look of sadness would, at times, come over her sweet face, he hastened to kiss away the tears with the magic whisper, "Love, I am so happy!"

It was some six months afterwards when Blanche was once more roused from her avocations by the presentation of Mrs. Dorrington's card, and an announcement that the lady was in the drawing-room.

But this time she scarcely needed a minute to smooth her always glossy and well-arranged hair, and throw off the apron she wore when in her household duties.

"I am come to ask a favour from you," said the soft-voiced aunt, as she kissed Blanche's flushed cheeks. "Your uncle has gone away for the whole day, and I am left alone at the hotel, so I am come to ask you to take me in and give me a dinner. Will you Blanche?"

The girl flushed; but then, with a half-impetuous smile at her own folly, she exclaimed, "How foolish of me! You know we are poor, and you will only expect a plain dinner. We shall be glad to have you."

Mrs. Dorrington smiled in her turn; and, after her bonnet was taken off, the two ladies sat in pleasant chat, varied by Blanche's singing and occasional absence from the drawing-room, till the master of the house returned.

And although the young couple did perhaps feel a little embarrassed at the simple dishes that were placed on the dinner-table, it soon passed away, and Quentin, at any rate, was more inclined to indulge an honest pride in the nicety of the belongings, and the tempting perfection with which the plain, inexpensive meal was cooked—thanks to the persevering attempts of the young housewife to master the mysteries of the cookery book.

Mrs. Dorrington made no remark, however, even in commendation; but Blanche felt that the kiss she received at parting had an almost maternal tenderness in its pressure; and the absence of her own indulgent but weak mother, on a long Continental tour with some old friends, made such affection doubly precious to the long-tried and generous hearted girl.

But it appeared to have been merely a sudden and passing impulse on the lady's part, in which her husband had no share.

Three months more rolled away, and still no