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A CHARMING COUPLE.

BY MRS. HOFLAND.

Ye fair married dames, who so often deplore
That a lover once blest, is a lover no more,
Attend to my counsel, nor blush to be taught,
That prudence must govern what beauty has caught.

OLD SONG.

"You are surely the happiest woman in the world, Lady Langdale, so far as regards the marriage of your daughter," said Mrs. Greary, an old and affectionate friend; "for Edward Launceston is a most extraordinary young man; handsome, wealthy, accomplished; lively yet steady, and well-educated. He seems, indeed, to have been born to be the husband of your sweet Louisa, who is so lovely and good, that I used to think she would never meet with a suitable match. What a charming couple they will be!"

"Very true," replied Lady Langdale, with an aspiration very like a sigh.

"Very true!" re-echoed the friend; "to be sure it is true, and more than true; they will be the happiest of the happy: surely you think they will; or you know something about the bridegroom, which I have never dreamt of."

"I know nothing of him," said Lady Langdale, quickly, "but what is good; have seen nothing but what is amiable. Your eulogium indeed awoke anxiety, for in considering him a charming man, I must deem him one who will be subject to many temptations. All the world is in league to render such an one dissipated; to seduce him from the home he loves, the wife he has promised to cherish, and the many duties which his situation calls on him to perform."

"Very true again; but when his wife is equally charming, which I am certain Louisa is, there is little doubt but her influence will counteract not only the general seductions of life, but those which are more to be dreaded for a man of his character. The most self-conceited coquette in the circles of fashion, will hardly seek to withdraw his heart from its allegiance to one so beautiful and talented as his own lady, who is indeed perfect."

"She is very lovely, very good, and very clever," said the mother; "but she is by no means perfect; it is not in human nature to be so; there is always some weak point in the best of us."

"Religiously speaking, there must be, I grant, but I have never found where it lay in Louisa; for, with all her grace and beauty, she is unconscious of it: I never saw a spark of vanity in her."

"Nor I, which is a great thing for a mother to say, but from this very absence of self-esteem, which is her greatest charm, there is connected a peculiarity of disposition, which may be fatal to her happiness, married as she is, to a man so delightful to all, and so exceedingly dear to herself. She never believes herself to be loved by others as she loves them; she doubts her own power of attaching them, and is of course subject to the misery of suspicion, even when the sound judgment with which she is blest, repels such a notion. As a girl, she was harassed with the fear that I preferred her brothers to her; at school, she supposed her governess loved her less than any one, because she was less loveable; such a thought may be fatal in married life to the happiness of her who indulges it, especially when united to a man who must attract attention, who may awaken improper sentiments without any blame on his part. I have suffered too much myself from this unhappy peculiarity in my dear child, during my long widowhood, not to fear for them both."

Mrs. Geary had herself known many and great misfortunes, for she had lost every member of a once flourishing family, and she was therefore inclined to think that her friend, (the happy mother of two fine boys, still at Etoft, and a girl beloved and admired by all, given this very morning in wedlock, to the man of her choice,) was making mountains of molehills, and vaticinating improbable evils, whilst she overlooked palpable blessings; but she only observed upon it, that "Lady L. was low spirited, from parting with her daughter, which was indeed a great trial, and made one apt to grow nervous, and conjure up a thousand fears and surmises, it was certain there were neither perfect characters, nor perfect happiness in this world, which was a very good thing, seeming we must all leave it so soon."

Meantime, Louisa and Edward pursued their way from Northamptonshire, where the bride had hitherto lived, to the metropolis, and although "some natural tears she dropped," for a more affectionate child never existed, they might be alike pronounced happy; Edward was, however, the more exhilarated, as being proud of his prize, and conscious of its value. When indeed, he

had exhibited her to a wide circle of congratulating friends, and had enjoyed the varied amusements presented by a new and fascinating world; he did not sink into the dulness frequently ascribed to matrimonial *tete-a-tetes*, or abate in any degree, those attentions so dear to the heart of woman. Louisa's song was still the sweetest that reached his ear, her form was the most graceful that met his eye; time passed swiftly in her society, and when an engagement, either of business or pleasure, called him from her, for a few hours, he returned with avidity, and met his welcome with delight; it was plain that he desired to be charming only in the eyes of her who was charming to him, and that all the higher parts of his character, as a good and useful man, were developing in their happiest atmosphere—connubial affection.

One day after an airing, he entered with peculiar joy painted on his countenance. "I have just learnt," said he, "that my uncle Somers has arrived in town, accompanied by my cousin Sophy, whom you have heard me frequently speak of, as a dear girl you would like to know. Will you accompany me to call on them?"

"Certainly," said Louisa, rising hastily; nevertheless, there was something shrinking in her manner, when she entered the carriage, and a more than necessary previous attention to her dress; but Edward did not remark either; he was eager to see relations, for having lost both parents, they stood to him in more stead than usual, and he longed to see their admiration of Louisa, and their approbation of his conduct as a married man. He had also pleasure, (as all men have) in adding to his society, a man of importance in his circle, and a woman whom every body liked.

They were received with the utmost cordiality and kindness, for Sophy considered herself as receiving a sister, who, although somewhat the younger, would be also a chaperon. She came herself, under the description of a plain yet very pleasing girl, for she had great vivacity, some wit, the ease which belongs to fashionable life, and the good temper which sweetens life every where—ever since she could remember, she had loved cousin Ned as a playfellow and relative, and that which she felt, she showed with the more ease, of course, because her handsome cousin was now disposed of to the most charming woman she had ever seen.

Alas! from this time, one charm faded rapidly on that fair countenance, for it neither wore the look of confidence, nor the smile of cheerfulness, and in a short time, languor and paleness were observable; alarm for her health, and grieved to see her spirits suffer, though she anxiously strove to re-assure him, as to both, the young husband could only look to Sophy Somers for help and comfort. In detaining her society for Louisa, he thought himself more assisted, than in gaining even the advice of Sir Henry Halford, whose prescriptions, for once, seemed of little use to the patient.

In consequence of the anxiety he suffered, Edward held many a long consultation with Miss Somers, for when his mind was not engaged with detailing the incipient symptoms of his lady's suspected disorder, he became occupied with descanting on her many excellent qualities, and in fact "he lived his wooing days again," by relating the story of his courtship, to one who lent a sister's ear to his tales, the more willingly, because she had something of the same nature, to confide to him. As however, Louisa, in a short time became silent, abstracted, averse from company, and although mild in manners, yet evidently discomposed in temper; they alike bent all their powers to her relief, and at length, Sophy earnestly advised the unhappy husband, either to take her into the country, for her native air, or entreat Lady Langdale to visit them, and assist in restoring the health and spirits of her daughter.

On the fond mother's arrival, a sorrowful tale was poured into her sympathizing heart by the anxious husband. "Louisa had lost her spirits, and her good looks, yet no physical cause could be assigned for such a change; she could not sleep at nights; was frequently heard to sigh, and more than once, he had seen her eyes fill with tears; her appetite was indifferent; her sense of pleasure evidently gone;—what could it be that affected her?"

Mrs. Launceston received her mother with joy that amounted to rapture; yet there was evidently something of an inward struggle, a desire to conceal feelings accustomed to be uppermost, but the welcome was scarcely over, when Miss Somers dropt in, on her way to a party, to know "if Lady Langdale had arrived."

So well and so happy did her friend look at this moment, that the kind hearted girl was delighted with the effect of a circumstance suggested by herself. "The poor thing," said she, internally, "was mother-sick, and no wonder; had my dear mother been spared to me, I think I could never have left her."

After the journey had been talked over, tea brought for the traveller, and Louisa's delight in the arrival, canvassed; Miss Somers, turning to Mr. Launceston, said:

"I am just thinking, Edward, you had better go with me to Mrs. Sneyd's rout, my carriage is waiting, you know, and you have cards; Louisa will give you leave gladly, because she is so happily engaged."

"You had much better go Mr. Launceston for then you will be happily engaged," said his lady in a tone of voice which said much to the perception of the mother.

"I don't think I shall," replied the husband, "you have kindly sent me out several evenings, when you said you should be amused by a book; but I have always found you worse on my return, and the fear of doing so again, would make me uncomfortable now; indeed, I am afraid the excitement this pleasure has given you, may, by-and-bye, be injurious."

"No, Lady Langdale will guard against that," said Miss Somers, as she rose to depart, at the same time casting on the invalid a look of such deep interest, and true regard, that it penetrated the heart of the mother, who observed so soon as she was gone:

"What a very sweet countenance Miss Somers has."

"Yes," said Launceston; "considering that she has not one tolerable feature, her expression is very good; in fact, she is an excellent creature, and one reads her disposition in her face."

Mrs. Launceston had drawn her lips together, in a manner that indicated a determination not to speak a word, good or bad, but they opened to emit a gentle sigh. Lady Langdale turning suddenly to her son-in-law, said in reply:

"Yet with all this, and perhaps much more, in your cousin's favour, she is not a woman to make Louisa jealous, nor are your attentions of such a nature as to justify her jealousy."

"Jealous, madam! jealous of Sophy Somers! What can you mean? Louisa never dreamt of such a thing."

"Yes; she has not only dreamt of it, but lost sleep, strength and beauty from that cause, and who shall say what she might not have lost besides! Speak Louisa, am I not right?"

But Louisa could not speak, she sank in a flood of hysterical tears upon her mother's bosom.

"It is plain to me," said Lady Langdale, "that from want of a little openness on my daughter's part, and the want perhaps, of a little prudence on yours—"

"Prudence!" exclaimed the angry, and, indeed, injured husband; "prudence could not be called for, when there was nothing to conceal, nothing to contrive. Miss Somers has been to me as a sister, and was to your daughter a warm and tender friend; if I have daily sought her advice, it was because I knew her to be such; if I have been tied to her society, it was because Louisa's ill health kept me from other company; if my love, my solicitude; my—but I shall say no more, there are some wounds that cannot be healed, and this is one of them; it lacerates the very heart."

As Launceston spoke, he rang the bell violently, and ordered his carriage, in a voice that spoke the agitation of his soul; Lady Langdale gently placing her still weeping daughter on the sofa, seized his hands, saying, "You can't go out to-night."

"Yes, madam; I shall go directly to my uncle's, and wait his daughter's return, and then inform them that my domestic happiness requires the sacrifice of their acquaintance."

"No, no, no," cried Louisa, throwing herself on her knees before him; "I love, I revere my uncle Somers."

"But you hate his daughter, that good girl who has felt so much for you; a daughter who will soon be the wife of an honourable husband; and it is necessary to remove her from the contamination of such a worthless *roue* as Edward Launceston, a man who, in the mere passion for change, could forsake his lovely young wife to 'batten on a moor.'"

"Forgive me, dear Edward, forgive me; I see I was wrong; for, from the very day you took me to visit Sophy, I have nourished the fear that you preferred her; she is so pleasant, so witty, so engaging, I feared that her society fascinated you. I thought you were, perhaps, wearied of your poor Louisa. I felt that—but I cannot tell you what I felt."

"But I can," said Lady Langdale; "from infancy, Louisa has loved too intensely, those to whom she was at all attached, and by the same rule has been subject to suspecting their return of love. I told you in your days of courtship, of this weakness, but you would not then listen to my 'tale of symptom'; you have now seen the effect of this mental disease, and can, I trust, pity her who suffers from it; that you also have suffered, is her pun-