

THE WHEELMAN'S WOOING;
OR
The Flower of Hawthorne Farm.

A CHRISTMAS YARN.

Written for the "Canadian Wheelman."
"Fall many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its fragrance on the desert air."

CHAPTER I.

Arthur Gresham was a most popular young man with both sexes; there is no denying the fact, even should anyone feel disposed to do so; and, moreover, he was an excellent wheelman and took a pride in displaying his deftness and skill, and fine, well-put-together figure, as he bestrode his glinting, nickel-plated steed, and traversed the streets of Bedevale, a small but prosperous city, where, as a law student, he was sharpening up his legal weapons preparatory to a career along the intricate pathways of the law, a pathway that is, of all others, one that it is well to traverse with mental weapons keen and ready for the fray at any moment; where foes lurk in ambush to attack the young adventurer, against whom none but the sharpest weapons avail anything, without which the aspirant for a silk gown had better essay some other walk in life.

Arthur possessed weapons, mentally speaking, of excellent metal, and, wise young man that he was, he found that the surest method of grinding those weapons to a pitch of exquisite sharpness was—bodily exercise. Having come to this conclusion, he had cast about in his mind the best and pleasantest way of giving his symmetrical limbs the needful amount of the desired exercise, and had finally settled, to his entire satisfaction, that bicycling was the very thing to do it. Accordingly he had "gone in" heavily for this pastime, joined an excellent club, and at the time this story opens, was acknowledged by the Bedevalians to be one of the most dashing and skillful riders in the place.

Our hero believing, and justly so, that a tour astride his favorite D. H. F. would be conducive not only to pleasure, but to health, determined to make one, unaccompanied, during his summer vacation, and no sooner did those halcyon days arrive than he proceeded to put his theory into practice, and one lovely July morning, having bidden *au revoir* to his friends over night, he mounted his wheel and away he went, intending to be absent just three weeks, and to "take in" all the principal points of interest within a reasonable distance of Bedevale, which place was surrounded by a beautiful country, through which most picturesque scenes of lake, wood and vale had been distributed by nature with a lavish hand.

The sun was just rising as our gallant wheelman topped the little hill to the north of Bedevale, and, with spirits elated by the glorious freshness of a summer morning, his nerves tingling with a delicious sense of the keenest enjoyment, inspired by that grandest of all elixirs, pure air, bowled along the splendid road in the direction of

Maudsley, a little town distant some twenty miles from the scene of our hero's labors amongst the dingy tomes of Blackstone or Chitty.

Now carolling to himself in very lightness of heart, now indulging in a few whiffs of an excellent cigar, the pale blue wreaths of smoke from which curled in the still and balmy air behind him, Arthur glided along.

The sweet notes of the robin fluted from the roadside trees; the hoarse cawing of the crows could be ever and anon heard; the bobolink uttered his cheery notes as he flew from one tall mullein stalk to another; and nothing but peace appeared to reign in the quiet country through which the wheelman sped.

Burns never made a truer remark than when he said:

"The best laid schemes o' mice and men,
Gang aft aley."

Arthur was looking forward to three full weeks of the purest enjoyment, planning in his own mind the fun he would have in such and such a place; the nice girls he would flirt with in another, and the jolly reunions he would have with old chums in still another, when the truth of Burns' lines was made apparent. Possibly, Arthur's thoughts wandered away too far from the immediate business in hand, for as he was descending a slight declivity at a rapid rate, his wheel ran against a treacherous stone, and before he could do anything to save himself, he had pitched head-first into the road where he lay without sense or motion.

CHAPTER II.

"Oh! woman, in our hours of ease,
Uncertain, coy and hard to please,
When pain and anguish wring the brow,
A ministering angel thou!"

"Father, the sick gentleman is ever so much better this morning," said dainty little Marion Hawthorne, the sturdy old farmer's daughter, to her father, one morning, some ten days after the incidents related in the last chapter. "He understood me when I spoke to him, and, father, he actually said he was hungry."

"Well, make 'im a bowl o' beef tea at once and put some life into 'im," replied old Hawthorne, a thoroughly honest old farmer of the English stamp, but most decidedly 'grumpy'; make 'im some beef tea and gi' it to 'im; we don't want no dead men round here; and Marion, look thee here, lass: doant'ee have too much to say to the young chap; he's one o' them city sprigs, and there's no trusting 'em," and he sallied forth to superintend his laborers in the field.

Marion Hawthorne was an anomaly. Born and bred in the country; she still possessed all the grace and refinement of a city girl of the best society. Denied, by the death of her mother, whilst she was still an infant, that care in her younger days which is almost essential to the formation of pure womanly character, Marion had, nevertheless, given full sway to her taste for reading and literature generally, gradually educated herself to a pitch of perfection scarcely to be credited by those who were acquainted with all the facts of the case, till now, at

the age of eighteen, she is introduced to the reader, a charming, intelligent, well-formed and vivacious girl, with dark sparkling eyes, pouting lips whose hue would put the brightest cherry to the blush, and cheeks which the pure country air delighted to utilize as a garden for the production of the most bewitching roses.

All that is piquant and charming, let the reader picture Marion Hawthorne to himself to be, and she flourished, a beautiful flower, seemingly a rare exotic amongst the coarser blossoms growing around her.

It is, perhaps, needless to state that the subject of Marion's remark, which opens this chapter, was our unfortunate hero, Arthur Gresham, who had been found with his broken machine beside him, lying insensible in the road, a stone's throw or so away from Farmer Hawthorne's dwelling, and having been carried into the house and placed in bed, he had never regained consciousness till the moment of which we are writing, when, much to Marion's joy—for it must be confessed she felt no little interest in the handsome stranger—he had come once more to his senses and—had asked for something to eat.

Very pale he looked as he lay in the snowy sheets of the wholesome farm-house bed, with the cooling breeze blowing through the open window upon his brow. Very different indeed was his appearance to what it had been on the morning when he had set forth upon his expedition but a week and a half before. But he was decidedly better this morning than he had been since he was picked up in the road, and the fact that he had asked for food was taken by Marion to be an excellent sign, as indeed it was, and when fussy little Doctor Spunkins called a couple of hours later and found his patient sitting up greedily causing a bowl of strong beef tea to disappear, with Marion sitting beside the bed casting furtive glances towards her well-favored but involuntary guest, he nodded his head with a sage and pleased air, and feeling Arthur's pulse, pronounced him to be fifty per cent. better.

Arthur's name and address were procured, and a boy dispatched to Bedevale, to inform the wheelman's friends of his condition and whereabouts, and in the evening the old uncle with whom he lived came hurrying out, anxious and alarmed, but only to have his fears dispersed by the good account given of his patient by the genial little doctor.

"I don't blame him," said the jovial little fellow, "if he *does* remain ill with such a nurse as Miss Hawthorne to look after him," and he bowed to the young lady in question. "Be hanged if I wouldn't almost consent to be an invalid myself if it were only for the pleasure of having so charming an attendant."

"Yes, Miss Hawthorne," broke in Arthur's uncle, "I can never thank you sufficiently for what you have done, for, though no one has told me how attentive you have been, I see traces of your care everywhere;" and he glanced towards a handsome vase of beautiful, freshly-culled flowers standing near Arthur's bedside.

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