



BY "SAMMY."

PART I.

More years ago than I care just now to call to mind, I was practising, in the city of Montreal, my profession as a doctor. Although a year had not passed away since I had won my diploma, I had been successful beyond the common. I gave the credit for this fact not so much to my own cleverness as to the circumstance that I had many social advantages over those of my class-mates who had passed in the same year with me. My grandfather had been engaged in the fortune-making fur trade of the North-West. My father had followed in his footsteps, but was not so lucky; for the American privateers, during the war of 1812, robbed him of nearly all his merchandise. He escaped, however, with enough to secure for him a modest competence for the rest of his days. My father wished me to follow in the commercial path which he and my grandfather had trodden. But I had no taste for the business, and so I resolved to become a doctor. When, therefore, I had taken my degrees, I had many friends at my back. At the time of which I speak the "Nor'-Westers" formed a kind of mercantile aristocracy; they were very exclusive in their social intercourse and very clannish.

I had another strong point in my favour. I was engaged to a young, gifted and handsome girl, the daughter of a retired "Nor'-Wester," who was a widower. She was, or would be, wealthy; but this fact in no way influenced me when I made her an offer of marriage. I do not claim any particular praise for not being affected by the consideration that she was an heiress. My observation of life has led me to believe that young men, who are conscious of their ability to make their way in the world, very rarely, in proposing marriage, allow themselves to be prompted by considering whether or not the woman has money. On the other hand this is the first question with the grub, the noodle and the drone.

It is now time that I should take the reader into my confidence, and give him my name. It is Edward Artton. The name of the lady was Eleanor Melville.

We had arranged that we should be married in a year after I had entered upon the practice of my profession. I had begun on the 3rd of January, 184—. The wedding day was fixed for the 7th of the January following. I have good reason to remember these dates with extreme accuracy; the latter one, in particular, was burned into my memory to such a depth that death only can efface it. Miss Melville's father, who had long retired from business, was favourable to our match. The only

child, besides herself, was a brother, named Ralph. He was older than she, and a young man of ability. He had been sent to England to finish his education. In Cambridge he took high honours in mathematics, but at the expense of his health. He came home to Canada, broken down, and when I first saw him, after his return, I could perceive that consumption had already fastened upon him. A council of medical men advised that he should at once proceed to the Bermudas. The hope was held out that this would save his life. He left Montreal for his new home in March, in the third month of my practice. It was the belief of the doctors that eight or nine months' residence in the Bermudas would suffice to restore him. The understanding was that, when recovered, which there was reason to believe would be before the end of the year, he should return in time for his sister's marriage.

The interval between the departure of young Melville and the time appointed for our marriage passed very pleasantly away. My intercourse with Eleanor increased day by day in tenderness and in happiness.

Here, however, I should pause to say that there was, in spite of every effort I made to shake it off, a sort of foreboding in my mind as to the perfect happiness of Eleanor. I could see that she was always anxious about her brother. She loved him very tenderly. I was rejoiced, therefore, when the third letter we received from him brought news that he was rapidly recovering. The effect on her was almost electrical.

In the last week of November a letter came from him informing his family that he had arrived in New York, on his way home from the Bermudas. He described his health as excellent, and declared his intention of proceeding at once to Montreal. On the evening of the day on which this letter arrived, another letter of a different nature reached me from the City of Quebec. The missive gave me to understand that I must proceed at once to Quebec to give evidence in an important suit involving the title of an aunt of mine to a seignior. Eleanor and I having promised to write to each other, by every post, I bade her an affectionate good-bye. An hour afterwards I was on my way to Quebec, in a sleigh drawn by a Canadian pony, for this was in the days before railroads.

On arriving in Quebec I found that the tedious processes of the law would detain me for some weeks. But the delay, deeply as I regretted it, could not be avoided. My first week had not passed in Quebec when I received a letter from

Eleanor, informing me that her brother Ralph had arrived. She was in high spirits over the event. I had no more from her. I was much distressed at the fact. The silence was all the more strange in view of the circumstance that I wrote to her every two days. In about three weeks our lawyers informed me that my part in the suit was finished. I set out at once for home. The journey was made while I was in a state which I might describe as mental coma. I remember that the snow was very deep, and that is all. I arrived in Montreal troubled in mind, fatigued in body, and utterly dispirited.

Before proceeding to my own home I determined to call at the house of the Melvilles. The mystery of the three weeks' silence I was resolved to fathom. A servant, whose face was strange to me, opened the door. I announced myself, and was about to enter. "Please, sir, do not come in," said the man, in a tone of real feeling; "as you are Dr. Artton, here is a letter for you, but please, sir, do not ask to come into this house."

I slipped a coin into the man's hand and departed. I felt that there was something terrible behind the servant's entreaty not to enter. But I determined to do nothing until I had ascertained the contents of the letter.

Once inside my own house I tore open the letter, and in a few glances devoured its contents. They were as follow:

"DEAR EDWARD,—The day after I wrote to you poor Ralph took very ill. I have been in constant attendance upon him for three days and as many nights. I am so very tired and sleepy and full of sorrow that I can scarcely hold the pen. The doctors say that the disease is dangerous, but that Ralph may—Dear Edward,—Father says he will finish this note; that I am not—"

ELEANOR.

Then followed, in the handwriting of Mr. Melville, the elder, on the same paper, this information:

"DECEMBER 17, 184—"

EDWARD ARTTON, ESQ., M.D.:

DEAR SIR,—I have sorrowful news for you. My son Ralph, my only boy, died since my poor Eleanor wrote on this paper the few words which precede mine. His death resulted from inflammation of the lungs, brought on by a cold caught in coming from New York for the purpose, mainly, of being present at the marriage of you and Eleanor. On the day on which she penned these words for you the doctors informed us that there was no hope for Ralph. Two hours after this news was made known, Eleanor was down with brain fever. While in this state her brother, whom she loved so well, died, and was buried. The crisis of the fever is past, but she is still weak, and will remain so for many a day to come. Meantime, for reasons which, as a medical man, you will understand, we have