

An Unexpected Confession;

Or, The Story of Miss Percival's Early Life.

CHAPTER XXIII.—(Cont'd)

Esther let him in, and then the three spent a pleasant hour in social conversation, when the young wife went away to her own room, thinking the friends might wish a confidential talk together.

When she opened her pretty pocketbook to inspect its contents, her breath was almost taken away upon finding three crisp one-hundred-dollar bills. She had never even held so much money in her hands at one time before.

When she heard Mr. King leave the room below, she went down to her husband again, remaining with him throughout the day, for she saw that he seemed to be growing weaker.

About six o'clock, and after he had had his evening meal, he told the nurse he thought he should retire. He however, begged Esther not to go away, but come and sit beside him for a while, after he was settled for the night.

When the nurse returned to the sitting-room she went to him and remained chatting with him at intervals upon various topics, until eight o'clock, when he had a distressful turn, which startled her exceedingly.

It soon passed, however, but the nurse thought it unwise for him to talk longer, and Esther arose to go to her own room.

The invalid caught her hand as she did so, held it in a lingering clasp for a moment, then raised it to his lips and left a light caress upon it.

"It is the hand that saved me, Esther," he said, in a scarcely audible tone. "God bless it and you forever!"

She was deeply moved, and her voice was husky with emotion as she bent over him, saying: "Good-night. I hope you will rest well until morning."

As she passed out into the hall, softly closing the door behind her, she saw the housemaid coming up from below with a card in her hand. "It is for you, Miss Wellington," Mary said, giving it to her, "and there's a caller in the parlor for you."

A shiver shook the girl from head to foot, as she read the name of Donald Lancaster upon the card. She had hardly believed that he would come; but it seemed that he was inclined to keep up the farce of two days previous a little longer.

Her lips curled bitterly at the thought; then she drew her form up slightly.

"You can tell the gentleman that I am engaged, Mary," she said, in a cold, hard voice, and then proceeded on her way upstairs.

A few moments later she heard the outer door shut heavily, and the sound was like the death-knell to all her fondest hopes.

At an early hour of the morning Mr. King came to her door to arouse her, and gently told her that Lord Irvington was dead.

He had come in shortly after she left, he said, and remained with him all night. He had fallen into a stupor about twelve o'clock, and had not rallied from it at all, passing quietly away just as the clock struck the hour of four.

And so, Esther, Lady Irvington, learned that she was a widow.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Donald Lancaster stood like one paralyzed after receiving Esther's message from the housemaid.

"Engaged?" he repeated, at length. "Did you give her my card?"

"Yes, sir."

"And was that all the message she sent me?"

"Yes, sir; she looked at the card and then said: 'You can tell the gentleman that I am engaged.'"

The young man flushed hotly. He could draw but one inference from such a message—namely, that Esther did not wish to see him.

Instantly his mind reverted to their meeting of the previous evening, when she had given him the cut direct.

The incident had troubled him somewhat at the time; but he had felt so sure that everything would be satisfactorily explained when he saw her, he had not allowed himself to dwell upon it.

"Can it be possible that she is jealous of Marjorie Dexter?" he wondered.

He could hardly believe she would be so unreasonable when only that same morning he had told her she was a relative, who was visiting his home for a few weeks.

He had given her credit for being sensible; and yet, now that she had so curtly refused to receive him he could think of no other explanation of her treatment of him.

At first he was impelled to write

a few lines upon the back of another card, begging that she would revoke her decision, but he did not care to reveal too much of the situation to the servants, and finally took his leave, mentally resolving to go directly home, write a letter discussing the matter, and implore her to appoint another time when he might see her.

But he was deeply hurt and disappointed, and was, therefore, in no very amiable frame of mind, when, upon entering his elegant home, his mother met him in the reception hall and asked him to come with her to the library for a quiet talk, as she had something of importance to say to him.

"Well, what is it?" he questioned, as he took the chair she indicated and saw by her face that something unpleasant as well as important was about to be sprung upon him.

"Donald, I feel obliged to speak to you with reference to Marjorie," Mrs. Lancaster began.

"Yes? Well?" he inquiringly observed, but with inward qualms.

"What are your intentions regarding her?"

"Why, really, mother, I—I suppose my intentions are to make myself as agreeable as possible to her as long as she remains our guest; I wish to do my utmost to make her enjoy her visit," he responded, bracing himself back in his chair and plunging his hands in his pockets; for now he was pretty sure he knew what was coming.

Mrs. Lancaster now began to bludge.

She was a remarkably handsome woman, and somewhat imposing when she assumed that haughty, authoritative air.

"And that constitutes the extent of your intentions regarding her, does it?" she icily demanded.

"As far as I know—yes," said Donald, trying to assume an air of indifference.

Then, meeting with a steady, direct gaze, the proud angry eyes fastened upon him, he broke forth irritably—for Esther's recent rebuff still rankled sorely in his breast:

"What are you driving at, mother? Out with it, and don't go beating about the bush."

"You know very well what I am driving at," as you rather coarsely express it," Mrs. Lancaster retorted, her upper lip curling with scorn at the term he had employed—just enough to reveal an unbroken line of fine, white teeth—"and you know that it is high time you came to some definite understanding with her, regarding your future relations with each other."

"Since my future relations with Marjorie will be what they are now—simply of a friendly nature—I do not see what future understanding is needed," Donald stoically replied.

"Simply of a friendly nature," indeed? excitedly returned Mrs. Lancaster, losing much of her brilliant color, her eyes blazing with repressed passion. "You know very well that for years you have practically been engaged to her, and it is high time that some announcement of the fact was made to the public."

"I have never pledged myself to Marjorie Dexter," said Donald, sitting erect and growing stern and white, for the situation was becoming serious. "I know," he continued, "that when I was but a boy, and we lived as neighbors to the Dexters, there was some jesting between the two families about cementing the friendship by a marriage in the future. I remember that Marjorie and I also laughed over the subject, now and then. But after we came to New York to live, I never gave the matter another thought, neither did I suppose that she treasured the slightest sentiment in connection with it."

"But she has, Donald," said his mother, impressively; "she laid those things deeply to heart; they grew with her growth, until she learned to love you as a man is seldom loved in this world, and the thought of becoming your wife is the dearest wish of her life."

Donald flushed hotly as he listened to these revelations, and he was far from feeling comfortable in view of them.

He knew that Miss Dexter appeared to enjoy his society; she had even been rather more familiar at times than was exactly agreeable, but he laid this to the intimacy of the families. But as for love, such as his mother had portrayed, he did not believe that the fashionable girl loved anyone in the world as she loved herself, and had he not been the prospective heir to a plump fortune, he felt very sure she would never have given the matrimonial jesting of the past a serious thought.

"Really, mother, I think you are making altogether too much out of what was mere pleasantry in those old days—" he began.

"You have only to ask Marjorie one important question in order to be satisfied upon that point," his companion interposed.

"You mean that I am to propose to her—ask her to be my wife?" "Exactly."

"Mother, I shall never do that," said the young man in a tone of quiet decision.

"Donald, you must!—all society is looking for it," Mrs. Lancaster burst forth excitedly; "her friends, our friends, all believe that she would favor us for the sole purpose of having the matter formally settled and announced."

"I am very sorry, mother, if such is the case. It seems to me, however, that society would have been more likely to suppose that such an arrangement would have been made previous to her visit here, if it was to be made at all; but, be that as it may, society will be disappointed for once, for I shall never ask Miss Dexter to marry me; I do not love her, and I will wed no woman without loving her."

"Donald, think you the advantage of such a marriage. The Dexters—"

"Mrs. Lancaster began pleadingly, when he checked her with a gesture expressive of disgust.

"Such an argument would not have the slightest influence upon me," he said; "I know that Marjorie Dexter will be a very rich woman by and by; I know she is handsome, and makes a fine appearance in society; but when I marry, I want a wife who will care more for me than for the world; not a leader of fashion, whom I should scarcely see from one week's end to another; I want a sweet, tender, womanly woman, who will make my home the dearest spot on earth."

"Really, my son, you have grown hypercritical all of a sudden! Pray, where will you find this paragon of perfection, this model wife, whom you have described?" sarcastically demanded his mother.

"I have already found her," said Donald, with placid frankness.

Mrs. Lancaster grew startlingly white.

"Who is she?" she curtly demanded.

"You have seen her—you already know her; she is Esther Wellington."

"Heavens! that plebeian, little apron maker, who comes here to take orders for housemaids' and waitresses' aprons?"

"Yes, mother, if you see fit to so designate her," Donald proudly ingenuously, "but a sweeter, more ingenuous, more beautiful girl is not to be found in New York City."

"Donald, are you demented?" "I know you are shocked, I know all you would say about a disgraceful mesalliance and a scandal in society; but Esther is the peer of any of your so-called creme de la creme—she would shine a queen among them. And, then, she has a heart—she is good, through and through," concluded this eloquent young lover.

"You shall never marry her, Donald," cried his mother, in a scarcely audible voice, but with a menacing note of passion in her tones that would have been appalling to a less dauntless swain.

"Oh, but I shall—this is, if she will have me," Donald replied, a shade of anxiety crossing his face as he recalled Esther's recent refusal to see him. "Come, now, mother, dear," he continued, in a gentler tone, as he saw the white, tense expression on the handsome face opposite him, "be reasonable, and listen to your mother's instinct rather than to your pride. I do not love Marjorie Dexter, and I should be wretched if bound to her for life; for, aside from our money and position, we really have hardly a sentiment or characteristic in common, and I am sure you are too fond of me to wish to ruin my life by driving me into a loveless marriage."

"Yes, I am far too fond of you to allow you to ruin your life by throwing it away upon a little, plebeian pauper, who has been begging from house to house here in New York for her daily bread," was the passionate retort.

"Mother," returned her son, with a hauteur that sat well upon him, "I think you are forgetting yourself, and also that I have never speak thus in my presence of the woman whom I have told you I love and intend to make my wife. You surely have also forgotten the tendency toward Scotch obstinacy which I have inherited from previous generations, when you assume that I can be driven into a union with one for whom I do not entertain a particle of affection; who—yes, I may as well confess it—is absolutely distasteful to me in some respects. Now, let this discussion cease," he continued, with a white, determined face that spoke volumes.

"I am a man, long past my majority, and capable of judging for myself, especially upon a matter of so much vital importance to me; moreover, I intend to do so."

He arose as he concluded, and his mother knew from his tone and manner that she could never drive him into submission to her will.

But she also possessed an indomitable spirit, and, woman-like,

determined to have the last word—for she was too angry to conciliate him; she drew herself proudly erect, and, rising also, exclaimed: "You shall never marry this low-born girl! I will move heaven and earth to prevent you from disgracing yourself and your family to such an extent."

Donald bowed with cold courtesy, but his eyes flamed with a dangerous fire, as he returned: "Miss Wellington is the daughter of the late John Cushman's sister, and she has been reared a lady, in spite of her poverty."

"Now, as I have an important letter to write, I beg you will excuse me. Good-night."

With another courteous inclination of his proud head, he walked quietly from the room, taking care to close the door noiselessly after him, although his Scotch blood was aroused to such an extent that would have been no little satisfaction to him to have banged it rudely. But Donald Lancaster was too well bred to be disrespectful to his mother.

(To be continued.)

FAITHLESS LOVERS.

Strange Penalties for Breach of Promise.

England is the best country on earth for breach of promise actions.

Any girl who can bring evidence that her affections have been seriously trifled with will be almost certain to receive substantial damages from a sympathetic English jury.

In certain parts of the United States breach of promise actions are not allowed to be brought into court, and the man is at liberty to become engaged and disengaged to as many maidens as he pleases.

In other parts of the States, however, huge damages are sometimes awarded on very slight evidence.

In Germany a special law has been framed which has completely abolished breach of promise actions. Should a young couple desire to become engaged, they visit the town hall and declare their willingness to marry, and sign, with witnesses, a series of documents which render a change of mind on the man's part practically out of the question. They are not engaged until this formality has been carried out.

Should either party discover that they have made a mistake and wish to withdraw from this agreement, the pair again visit the town hall, and another series of documents are formally signed, witnessed, and sealed. The authorities then determine the question of compensation for injured feelings.

In France breach of promise actions are extremely few. The French law requires the plaintiff to prove in court that she has suffered pecuniary loss by her fiancé's fickleness. Throughout France a bride almost invariably has a marriage dot, large or small, and the fact is likely to weaken her case.

The same law has been adopted in Austria and Holland, where the number of such cases is small. In most of the Continental cities the parties concerned take the law into their own hands and get their big brothers or muscular friends to administer a severe thrashing to any fickle man who breaks his promise to marry.

Still another method is followed in Italy. The law requires the person suing for breach of promise, of whichever sex, to produce a written promise to marry from the defendant, otherwise the case is instantly thrown out of court. The difficulty of producing such evidence is, of course, practically insurmountable, and cases are rarely tried. Many an Italian girl, therefore, whose affections have been blighted does not hesitate to revenge herself by means of the stiletto.

CLEVER WOMEN.

Noticeable Feature at Unique Exhibition of Clothing.

A striking feature of the unique exhibition of clothing held at the Madison Square Garden (writes The London Chronicle's New York correspondent), was the large number of women exhibitors representing factories which as the result of their enterprise have sprung up all over the country within the last few years.

These women have in no case been engaged in the manufacture of women's clothing more than three or four years. The story of their success reads like a fairy tale. One of them—the daughter of English parents—was left some ten years ago with several small brothers and sisters to support. She entered the business house of Marshall Field in Chicago, and three years afterwards found herself established in Paris as their buyer for ladies' underclothing.

Three years ago she decided to manufacture in her own behalf. She began with twenty workwomen. Now she employs 600, in addition to nearly a hundred agents traveling in every part of the world. Miss Leona Forster, who has built up this enterprise, is still in the early thirties. She is petite and as dainty as a rosebud. She wears Parisian gowns exquisitely cut and of charming simplicity. She tells me that by living rationally and dressing comfortably she finds herself able to spend the day in her factory from 7 a. m. until 3 p. m. in summer and from 8 a. m. until 5 p. m. in the winter. Miss Forster explained that her success was due to her entire devotion to her business.

"English girls," she declared, "of the better class make their business a subsidiary matter to their social success. So many of them, pouring out by the hundred from schools and colleges every year, are seeking some genteel occupation which will leave them free to play tennis and attend unlimited numbers of afternoon teas. Few of them succeed in business in England because their habits are not businesslike."

With Miss Forster are exhibiting two Scotchwomen who are daughters of professional men in Scotland. They went to America to teach, and have found a more profitable livelihood in business. One of these ladies lamented that so little was done to further the emigration of women of the better class in America. There is a demand for them in America, she declares, because they are better educated and more reliable than the young women of America.

IS NO EXCUSE FOR HER.

The Untidy Woman Who is a Blot on Her Sex.

There is no excuse for the untidy, disorderly woman—she who leaves odds and ends wherever she goes. It is a sad fact that a great many husbands are far nearer about their belongings than their wives, and many a man has decided that matrimony was a failure because the house resembled a rag box rather than a home.

Every neat man with orderly habits ought to be such a reproach to the opposite kind of woman that she should retire from society until she changed her ways.

If we are neat and methodical in our ways we are lacking in the chief attribute of woman. She is meant to keep the world in order and so make life beautiful, while man gives his whole time to work.

Not all the good qualities in the world can redeem the sloppy woman from being a failure as a woman.

She can be brilliant, witty and good, but she is a poor creature if she is slovenly in appearance and if her home is one jumble of dust and things out of place.

We cannot all have rich and beautiful things around us. Some of us must go clad in cotton and eat from pine boards. But those boards should be scrubbed until they glisten like snow, and the cotton dress should be as fresh as the morning.

And, maiden, there is no need of your wearing cheap jewelry that needs repairing, cheap laces that need washing and cheap feathers that won't curl, and you don't have to use in your house spotted tablecloths, dust covered bric-a-brac and broken furniture.

Better an empty room with four bare walls.

ELECTRIFYING AN ELEPHANT

A very curious accident occurred in Mysore, India, recently. A Palace elephant mahout, seated on a huge tusker, happened to pass under the main-line wires conveying current from the power-station. Thinking he would test the truth of anyone being killed if the wire were touched, he was foolish enough to place his hand on the wire. The effect was disastrous. Both mahout and elephant were knocked down instantly, and lay insensible. The elephant, after a short while, got up, and rushed about in a dazed manner, reeking with carriages, posts, etc., in its mad career. After a most exciting chase, the semi-electrocuted elephant was captured by means of two other elephants.

The Farm

BEEF TYPE OF CATTLE.

The general appearance of the beef animal, when of correct type shows a distinctly meat-producing form. The animal is compact and broad of back from shoulder points to hips; has a wide, deep body; short and somewhat thick neck; wide, deep full bosom; rather broad, thick, fleshy hind quarters; and a generally deep, wide body. Viewed from one side, the top and bottom line of body quite parallel with the back quite level. From front or rear the outline should be rather full and broad. Cattle of this type are referred to as "blocky," indicating compactness and neatness of form. If the body is inclined to be long, it may be termed "rangy," while animals long of leg, showing too little depth and fullness of body, may be termed "leggy."

The head should have a broad, strong muzzle, indicating superior grazing and feeding capacity. The nostrils, when somewhat prominent and large, with a wide nose show ample nasal capacity to supply the lungs with air. A Roman nose sometimes occurs with cattle, but it is neither attractive nor desirable. The distance from the muzzle to the point immediately between the eyes is preferably short, with some curve or "dish," as it is termed, just below the eyes which should be wide apart, large and indicate a gentle temperament. A quiet eye means an easy feeder, while a nervous, restless eye shows an animal unsatisfactory to handle and care for. The forehead, as indicating mental capacity, should be broad and reasonably full. The face and cheeks, in a superior head are full and deep, connected with a rather broad, strong lower jaw. If on the horned type, the horns should not be coarse at the head, but should show plenty of fine texture and quality, and be graceful and of harmonious proportions. An abundance of rather long hair should crown the poll or top of the head. It is very desirable that the ear should be neatly attached to the head, without coarseness, and that it should be of superior quality and neatly pointed and covered with silky hair, with long hair at the edges or tips.

The neck of the beef animal tends to be short, thick and muscular, of medium depth, and should be neatly attached to the head and smoothly blended to the shoulders. The bull at maturity show a neck of more length, with heavier muscles, some arch and a heavy coat of hair. The female will have a shorter, lighter neck, with less thickness and less depth. The steer should have a shorter, thicker, fuller, smoother fleshed neck than the cow. When in perfect pose, with head up, the top line of the neck should be slightly raised above the height of the withers.

The shoulders should extend well into the back, lying smoothly covered with flesh, blending neatly with the body. A high type of shoulder is uniformly covered with flesh from shoulder point to top of withers. Rough angular shoulders, unevenly covered, are among the most common defects of cattle. A prominent shoulder also emphasizes the development behind it.

The breast and chest are most important. The former should be carried well forward and be broad and full in the bosom. As one stands and views a beef bull in show form, a great breadth of breast and strength of brisket meets the eye. Sometimes the breast and chest have great depth and the brisket comes within fifteen inches of the level of the foot. Viewed from one side it may curve forward like the prow of a ship. With the cow considerable bosom may show, but not in so great a degree, and with less breadth and feminine outline. The chest which lies between the shoulders and just back of them should be full at the crops, showing much spring of rib and well filled out in the front flanks. The most beautiful front on the beef animal no matter whether bull, cow or steer, is a smoothly laid, well fleshed shoulder, with a strong arch of rib behind, leaving little or no depression. Much depression behind the shoulders or a narrow, contracted, low chest indicates lack of constitution.—Plumb's Types and Breeds of Farm Animals.

PROOF POSITIVE.

A poor laborer was charged with a petty offence. "Have you anyone in court who will vouch for your good character?" said the judge.

"Yes, sir; there is the Chief Constable."

The Chief Constable was amazed. "Why, your honor, I don't even know the man," protested he.

"Now, sir," broke in the culprit, "I have lived in the village for twenty years, and if the Chief Constable doesn't know me yet, isn't that a character for you?"