

FLORENCE CARR.

A STORY OF FACTORY LIFE.

CHAPTER IX.

THE IRONMASTER AND THE MOTOR.

Sidney Beltram might as well have tried to stop a rushing stream in its course by throwing himself into it as a stop-gap, as attempt to stem the current of his aunt's tongue or place the least restriction upon her conversation. It annoyed—irritated him more than he cared or even dared to express to meet this man at his own table, and find his aunt and sister so thoroughly at home with him. But Miss Stanhope, though she saw the frown on her reverend nephew's brow, was determined not to notice it, and to have her own way. So, luncheon being little more than half over, she said—

"Sidney, you remember that poem you admired so much?"

"Yes, I remember it perfectly."

"Well, I have found out who the author is; you'll never guess. Shall I tell you?"

"You, if you please."

"It is Mr. John Gresham, Mr. Gresham's brother. Just imagine that!"

"Really, I had no idea we had such a poet in Oldham."

"No, that's what I told Mr. Gresham," continued the irrepressible old lady. "I was saying how delighted you would be to see him and make his acquaintance. You will bring him with you, won't you?" she went on, turning to her guest.

"I shall be only too happy," was the natural reply.

"Thank you. Shall you be disengaged to-morrow?"

"Yes, I believe so."

"Then suppose you and your brother come in and take tea with us in the garden, about six or seven o'clock."

The young man bowed.

"Sidney, I am sure, will be glad to see you and make your brother's acquaintance. Two such clever men, I am sure, ought to know one another."

Miss Stanhope was wise in her generation, as you will perceive, and ranking her nephew with the poet and ironmaster had the effect she intended of making the reply of the former a cordial, even pressing invitation, instead of a merely formal assent to her own.

Lady Helen might have seconded the invitation with a glance—perhaps she did—but her tongue was discreetly silent, for, to be candid, she rather admired the young cotton spinner.

She had heard none of the bad stories about him—perhaps they would not have influenced her if she had.

And Lady Helen, having only two hundred a year of her own secured by her late mother's settlement—not enough, her aunt declared, even to dress upon—was not quite insensible to the spinner's wealth, any more than she was to his undeniable good looks.

So she smiled, perhaps, faintly blushed, then began to talk of the mills and cotton factories, and the great desire she had always felt to go over one and see how the cotton was spun, carded, and prepared for use.

Of course Gresham volunteered to show them over his mill, and Miss Stanhope, knocking her nail on the head, fixed a day in the following week for the visit in question.

Poor Beltram did not know what to do.

Luncheon, however, not being a very heavy meal at the rectory, soon came to an end, and the reverend gentleman, determined not to leave the wolf behind him in the fold, observed that he had some calls to make in the town, and would walk down part of the way with his guest.

"A polite way of getting rid of me," thought the spinner. But he acquiesced, nevertheless.

The two uncongenial spirits had not proceeded far together, however, before they met the subject of their conversation at dinner, John Gresham, whom his brother at once introduced to the motor, repeating the invitation for the following day.

Having succeeded in bringing the presumed wolf away from the sheepfold, Sidney Beltram was disposed to be amiable, in addition to which a feeling of mutual kindness and sympathy seemed to spring up in the hearts of the two young men thus introduced at once, and they were soon conversing freely; while Frank

not caring for the company of either at that particular moment, made some excuse and left them, promising to be punctual at the rectory on the morrow.

If Sidney Beltram had any business in Oldham that day, he did not execute it, for, having fallen into a discussion with John Gresham, and being invited to Bankside, the two walked off, Sidney, for the time, forgetting all his objections to the brother of his companion.

Indeed, it was not until he was returning home that night, having stayed to dine at the Greshams, that he remembered the existence of the objectionable member of the family.

"But no sensible woman would ever think of the spinner while his brother was by," he thought, by way of silencing his doubts, "and if Helen did love such a man as John Gresham, and wished to marry him, well, of course it would be a great misalliance, but all things considered, I don't think I should object, but his brother—certainly not, never! I will never consent."

CHAPTER X.

HER LADYSHIP IS WOUNDED.

I have hinted at the rivalry that from their

mined, if only to thwart his brother, to go seriously in for the prize and win.

An earl's daughter might very well come to him as his wife without a farthing by way of dowry.

She had high birth, position, and connections. As Lady Helen Gresham she would take the lead in the society to which he would bring her.

Yes, he would marry her, found a family, and let the world see that the eldest of the Greshams was not such a wild, brainless rascal as they had imagined.

So he determined that very night, and pretty well versed in the art of flirtation, especially when it was his head and not his heart that was interested, he went to work in a manner that, while it irritated the motor and his brother almost beyond endurance, afforded them no possible chance of interference.

A very unfortunate introduction was that which Rowena, Lady Helen's maid, had been the means of making, for it had imported an apple of discord into the family that could never utterly be eradicated.

Despite this little by-play, the evening passed off pleasantly.

keeping outside the gates of Paradise lest I should one day be driven from or kicked outside them."

He paused, took the cigar from his mouth, and fixed upon her a look which made her eyes droop and her cheek for a moment flush till it nearly rivalled in color the deep red rose she held in her hand.

"You know what I would ask you," he said, in a low tone, and with his fine dark blue eyes still fixed on her changing face. "We have known each other but a short time, it is true, but the heart counts its existence by emotions, not minutes, and measured by that standard, I have known you for years. Still, you may think me hasty, abrupt, but knowing my danger, what would you, as a friend, advise me to do—go or stay?"

There was silence for a moment, and then, feeling she must speak, Lady Helen said—

"I would not conjure up phantoms, or fly from an imaginary danger if I were you, Mr. Gresham."

And she turned to leave him.

But he caught her hand, the hand which held the rose, and pressed her fingers to his lips, as he asked—

"You bid me hope?"

"I say you may hope," was the reply, as she tore her hand away, leaving the rose still in his grasp, and turned to return to the house, to be alone, alone with her own thoughts and sweet maiden blushes.

He made no further effort to detain her.

He had got all he had asked for, all that for the time he desired, the assurance that he had forestalled his brother, and that with a little perseverance and patience, the prize they coveted would be his.

And a smile of triumph—a smile that had something also of malice in it, came over his handsome face, as his brother, who had been an eye-witness to part of the scene, having followed him to the garden, came forward now, pale, calm, and evidently restraining himself by an effort.

"You seem to have improved the occasion, as the parsons say," observed John Gresham, bitterly, as he reached his side.

"Yes, I never waste time on such matters. Life is short, and one may as well make the best of it. I hope you admire my tale. You didn't think I should fly at such high game, eh?"

"I confess I did not."

was the reply, while it required an effort to repress the indignation he felt to pitch the vain coxcomb into the water by the side of which they stood.

"Eh, that's the way, lad," he continued, releasing for a moment into the dialect or brogue. "You read books and experiment on words, while I read hearts and touch and probe them—women's hearts, that's what makes the world and mars it, but then it is not every man who's got my advantages."

And he stroked his moustache with a self-satisfied, complacent air, as much as to say—

"Envy me, my man. You cannot boast of one-tenth of my animal beauty."

But his brother turned from him contemptuously, observing—

"No, nor is it every man who would like to change characters with you, your good looks and unlimited insolence, taken into the bargain. Don't make too sure of the prize; she isn't yours yet."

"Bah! my good fellow, a woman in love rather makes her lover to be a bit of a devil. She's got the noble work of reforming him, don't you see? What capital occupation there will be for my lady."

And he laughed heartily at his own joke.

John was too angry, too much irritated to reply.

The impression made on his heart by Lady Helen's beauty and high-bred grace was too new, too recent to give his brother's success the same sting and pain it might at a later period have inflicted; still, it was hard that the only woman whose face he had ever considered worth a second glance, should be snatched up, before his very eyes as it were, and by one, too, whom he knew to be so utterly unworthy of her.

He was not the man, however, to yield to pain or disappointment.

Once convinced that the trial must be accepted and endured besides, try to dissipate it as he would, something like a feeling of contempt would creep into his heart for the woman who could so readily be dazzled by his brother's very supercilious character and attractions.



"YOU BID ME HOPE?" ASKED FRANK GRESHAM.

childhood had existed between the two brothers Gresham.

Not that it was a demonstrative feeling.

On the contrary, they never came to any open rupture or quarrel, and they both ostensibly lived in the same house; still, there the feeling was, and if there was anything that one of the brothers had set his heart upon, it immediately became of inestimable value to the other.

Like his brother in one respect at least, John Gresham's acquaintance with women had been limited to the various grades of society, none of it very polished or refined, that is to be met with in the manufacturing towns.

His introduction to Lady Helen Beltram was almost like a new revelation to him. Here was his ideal realized, so at least he believed, and he watched her every graceful movement, listened to every word that fell from her lips like one entranced.

The impression thus made upon him was quickly noticed by his brother and Miss Stanhope.

"Two strings to one's bow are better than one," muttered the aunt thoughtfully. "I could always manage two lovers at once myself; it was only when I tried it on with four at a time that I came to grief. Ah, Helen must not do like that; it is the girl that has a train of lovers after her that never gets a husband."

And Miss Stanhope sighed, and glanced towards the glass to see the reflection of an antiquated spinster, very unlike the sparkling beauty and fashionable belle she could well remember to have been.

But it was all her own fault.

Frank Gresham, too, had noticed his brother. His keen eye had seen the dark cheek flush, the eye dilate as though with surprised wonder.

The signs were unfailing to his mind.

He had never to his knowledge seen his brother so touched before, but the bare fact of it gave Lady Helen a new value in his eyes.

He had previously admired her, it is true, but admiration is cold before the feeling which he felt she was inspiring in the heart of his brother, and believing that where the lady herself was concerned he had the best chance, he deter-

The ladies had left the room some little time, and Frank Gresham, feeling that if he stayed at table much longer, he should take more wine than was good for him, took a cigar from his pocket. Observing that he would smoke it in the garden, he seized his hat, and leaving the room, was soon wandering about among the flower beds, enjoying the luxury of a smoke.

Now it so happened that Lady Helen Beltram, finding her aunt very sleepy when they had been in the drawing-room together a few minutes, had left the old lady to her after-dinner nap, and had likewise stepped out into the cool evening air.

The natural consequence of which of course was that, after the lapse of a few minutes, the two met.

"Do you object to my cigar?" asked the young man, preparing to extinguish it.

"Not in the least; indeed, I rather like it. I do so wish that Sidney would smoke; it seems such a resource for a man."

"It is. If ever I feel savage or vexed or disappointed, my invariable resource is a pipe or cigar, and it usually puts me right or helps me to bear it."

"And does it often happen that you are savage or vexed or disappointed?" asked the young lady, with a provokingly quizzical smile.

"Not very often, but you know one does get so sometimes; but I suppose you never know what those sensations are?"

"Which sensations?"

"Being savage, for instance."

"No, I don't think I do, and I don't think I could bite as a savage would, if I tried."

"And I don't think you would do much mischief if you succeeded," he retorted, with an admiring smile.

"Don't you?"

"No; I think your smile far more dangerous than your teeth could ever be; indeed, I was just wondering whether discretion would not be the better part of valor."

"The better part of valor?" repeated the young lady, either affecting not to understand him, or else really not seeing the drift of his conversation.

"Yes. Taking to my heels, for instance, and