

TO MY WIFE.

(Translated from the French of Victor Hugo.)

Since her "each soul doth yield,
To some one's claim,
Its fragrance, or its song,
Or else its flame:

Since here, below the skies,
Each heart bestows
On that to which it clings
Its thorn or rose:

Since April lends the oak
Its rustling tune,
Since night accords to grief
Oblivion's boon:

Since Zephyr wafts the birds
To woodland bowers,
And dawn empearls with dew
The tender flowers:

Since, when the wave at last
Attains in bliss
The welcome shore, its lip
Bestows a kiss:

I give thee now, while thus
I bend o'er thee,
The best and choicest gift
Possessed by me.

Dearest, receive my thought,
Though sad with fears,
That reaches thee, like dew,
In plaintive tears:

Receive each vow of mine
That ne'er betrays,
Receive the light and shade
Of all my days:

My love, to which no doubt
Of thee belongs,
And the caressing words
Of all my songs:

Receive my dreams that seem
The sport of chance,
That know no other star
Than thy sweet glance:

My muse, that nought on earth
From thee beguiles,
That weeps, when thou art sad,
And seldom smiles.

Fair idol of my soul!
Receive my heart,
Whose pulse would cease to beat
Should love depart.

Montreal. GEO. MURRAY.

MISS BETHUNE'S ROMANCE.

CHAPTER IV.

"There is John Bengough coming here, at last," said Louisa Clinton, who was looking from behind the Venetian blind one warm afternoon.

"It is more than a month since he called," said Louisa; "I call it very ungrateful, after all we have done for him."

"Well, I am sure we do not want him," said Louisa; "only he must have found it very dull without us, for to my certain knowledge he hasn't a friend in the world."

"O, you're mistaken," cried Harriette; "I have seen him several times going in and out of Miss Bethune's. I wish Miss Bethune would mind her own business; she is a deal too fond of interfering with other people. I believe it is there that he's going now—yes, he has passed the house."

"What can she see in him?"

"Or he in her?"

"I wonder what they find to talk about," continued Harriette, smiling. "I should like to see them together."

It was true that Bengough had called on Miss Bethune with unconventional frequency during the past month. The charm which he had at first experienced in her society deepened on further acquaintance. His existence at Cambridge had been rather a dreary one; for, though his disposition was sociable, life there was too new to him to admit of his readily making friends. He had come unusually near to the realization of that ideal of hard work and frugal living which so many undergraduates entertain; and for the time he had looked stoically on all those supplementary rays of light and warmth which render life more human. His intercourse with the Clintons had strengthened him in this frame of mind; but his introduction to Miss Bethune had added a new light to his views of thing. He began to see that he had despised that with which he was not really acquainted. He had judged of the elegances and refinements of life, not from the things themselves, but from his own hasty conclusions as to what they must be. Here was a revelation to him; and one in comparison with which his old ideal sank into coarseness and insufficiency. But it was characteristic of Bengough that the delight he took in the new views to which he had been converted entirely outweighed any jealousy, which it might have been natural for one who had adhered so devoutly to his tenets to experience on seeing them supplanted. Small changes are liable to be looked upon as eras when one is twenty-three and new to culture and society, and the young Australian now looked back to that period, previous to his acquaintance with Miss Bethune, with the same astonishment as a critic of the present day might be moved to by the bygone supremacy of the *Edinburgh Review*.

Hitherto, John Bengough had seen little of womankind, and he had thought little thereof. With the passion of love, it is true, he was, to a degree, conversant, for he had read, by way

of culture rather than for enjoyment, some of the standard novels in the English language, and most of the lyric poetry. These studies had had the effect of disinclining him to believe in the genuineness of the passion described, or admitting its existence; to regard it as the monopoly of the unoccupied or the weak-minded. He indeed looked forward to marrying some day, when, apart from his fellowship, he should have secured an independent position; but his prophetic glimpse of the lady of his choice had taken the form rather of a kind and sensible friend, who would be the mother of his children, than of a paragon of beauty, at whose feet it would be his ambition to fall.

This is often the way with men whom the circumstances of their lives have led to believe that they incline towards phlegm. But it is only natural that these very men, whose amatory energies have never been trifled with, should be the most ardent when once ignited. Thus it was with Bengough.

Now, to the minds of all readers of fiction of any experience, one fatal obstacle, alone sufficient to prevent Mr. Bengough from the dream of proposing marriage to the lady of his affections, must at once present itself. He was a poor man; she was a woman of easy fortune. Yet unnatural as it may appear, this circumstance formed no deterrent to the mind of the young man. Ourselves, indeed, are inclined to believe that to few naturally honourable men would it have done so; nay more, we should certainly have expected one of two sequels to await the man to whom it did. Either he would be pushed from the edge of a cliff by a villain, or else the ship in which he was returning home would be lost with all on board. But this is not all, for, after due lapse of time, we should certainly expect him to re-appear—in the first case, having miraculously escaped without injury; or, in the second, having at the last moment changed his mind and come home by another vessel. John Bengough had strong arms, a hard head, and a fine energy.

Miss Bethune's sharp eyes were not without catching some indications of change in the young Australian. She remarked that for some time back he had ceased to talk eagerly, as at first, about the chances of securing a fellowship. She imagined that the attractions of London might be getting between him and his purpose; and, consistently with the interest which she took in him, she resolved to give him a word of caution.

That she suspected no more of the real state of his feelings was due to the fact that he had hitherto concealed it studiously. Though longing for an opportunity to declare himself, a certain diffidence and conscious ignorance as to how people generally acted in these cases had caused him up to the present to reject what occasions had offered, on the ground that they were likely to be precursors of better ones. Matters had been in this state for some time, when Bengough at last determined to bring it to an end. It was on the afternoon when Louisa Clinton had observed her connection approach Miss Bethune's dwelling that the lady resolved to take her visitor to task on the ground of laxness in his former pursuit.

When they had been seated together for some minutes, she began:

"Do you know, Mr. Bengough, that I notice a change in you since first you used to come and see me?"

"Do you?" cried John joyfully.

The opportunity was surely come.

"Yes," replied Miss Bethune somewhat apologetically, "indeed I do."

John's heart beat too fast to allow him to fill up this momentary gap in the conversation although he longed to do so.

Hester continued half-playfully,

"When first you came here you were full of a certain ambition, one that interested me very much; but you seem for the moment to have lost it. You never speak of it. I even imagine that you avoid speaking of it. How is that? You see I am frank with you; be frank with me."

She intended to go on to tell him that the motherly, or perhaps auntly, interest she took in him had prompted her to this step, and much more may be imagined. But Bengough did not give her time.

"I will," cried he. "I have been wishing day and night to talk to you about it. It is true that I have lost that old ambition, but I have found another one that makes me indifferent about the old one and everything else—"

He had started forward, and held her hand in his. He had full command of his voice now; love-making seemed simple, easy—the one natural thing in the world.

"The Miss Clintons!" cried at this moment the footman, flinging the door wide open.

Louisa and her sister had come to see for themselves what Miss Bethune and Bengough found to talk about together.

CHAPTER V.

Thinking is a luxury for which the woman of fashion oftener than the seamstress has to wait. It is frequently night-time before the former can snatch half an hour from the infinite small calls upon her time to quietly dwell upon, digest, and view in all its bearings some indication, word, or situation which has been in her mind since the morning. Thus it was with Hester Bethune. The young Australian's sudden fervour had surprised her beyond measure. Her feminine instinct told her that he had been

on the brink of an offer of marriage when the Clintons arrived. And yet this was so completely unexpected, that it seemed incredible. She questioned the efficacy of her instinct. She longed for quietness to repeat John's words to herself, and arrive at a conclusion, founded on something more to be relied upon than instinct, concerning their weight.

But it was not to be. The Clintons stayed long, chattering in their most agreeable manner. They did not, in fact, move to take their departure until a fresh set of visitors was on the stairs. This second set remained until the dressing-bell rang. Then, at last, Miss Bethune was alone; but she was not free, for weariness had weakened her powers of opposition, and habit compelled her to submit to being attired by her maid. Then came dinner, during which she was again alone; but who could think with a servant in the room? At last the meal was over, and she was back in the drawing-room. The time was come. Deliberately she seated herself at the writing-table, and, bracing herself for a serious effort, began to retrace the words of the afternoon. Need it be said that, by reflection and stern step-by-step deduction, she arrived at no conclusion? That John Bengough loved her was not long in appearing indisputable, but it was instinct unaided that taught her this.

Resting her head on her hands, Miss Bethune reflected on the position.

He loved her—the thought sent a glow through her heart. It is true that before that afternoon she had never thought of regarding him in the light of a possible husband; but with a woman, the mere declaration of love is often enough to inspire a return of the passion. He loved her; already he had given proof of his devotion by the impetuous sacrifice of all his cherished prospects for her sake. It was a delicious thought. Her life hitherto had been so bare of love; her want of it had been so great. With closed eyes she abandoned herself for a moment to the sweetness of this dream. She saw Bengough in his rugged simplicity before her. She thought of his sternly conscientious guidance of his own life, of his fresh heart, of the complete absence of self-consciousness in him (and this is a charm of peculiar power to a woman.) Her heart warmed and her eyes filled with tears. Almost she felt that strong arm round her, that rough warm cheek against her own.

But no, no, it was only a dream; a dream which one might acquiesce in for a few moments, but which could have no realization in subsequent events. It was not to be thought of. Hester was fifteen years older than her lover; "and yet," said she, "I think I could make him happy." Ah, for a few years perhaps; but look ahead; think of the time when he will be forty and you five-and-fifty—he in the prime of life; you an old woman. Too true!

Late into the night did Hester continue seated at her writing-table. At length she rose suddenly, with the swift movement of one who has come to a decision, and hastens to begin carrying it out, lest his hardly-won prize escape. There were traces of fresh tears about her eyelashes; but her heart was, if full of sadness, serene.

CHAPTER VI.

The next day John Bengough called again; but Miss Bethune was not at home. She had a faint hope, one of those groundless hopes in which no one believes, but on the strength of which many act, that the complications of the situation might find some solution in which she should not be obliged to take the active part. She experienced a painful shrinking from the task which lay before her; but the more painful this shrinking seemed, the more resolute did she in her inward self become that her duty was not one to be shirked or postponed.

She was angry with herself when she heard that Bengough had called. She had half hoped he would have written; and seeing that he had not, she began to think how much better for them both it would have been if he had. But these thoughts only continued for a few moments. The sight of her lover's card roused her, and she came quickly to a resolution.

There was an evening party at the Clintons' that night, from which she had intended excusing herself; she would go. She went.

The party was a great success. Harriette and Louisa had been for many days engaged in contrivances by which it might appear that much money had been expended on the decoration of the room, such not in reality being the case. They had worked on the comfortable principle that anything which they did not wish to be seen would not be noticed.

"People do not look at things so closely at a party," said Louisa re-assuringly; "or if they do, they have no business to," she added more dogmatically. "I'm sure I never do!"

Thus, with masterly rapidity and happy breadth of regard, these two artists in flowers had laboured, utilizing all. The same principles applied to the supper and refreshments generally.

The Clinton girls were in particularly buoyant mood; they went about saying a few suitable words to every one, charmed by their cleverness and secretly pluming themselves on their discretion, and the admiration it must command in the eyes of the seeing. Dull people, of slightly inferior social standing, they asked after their relations; to young ladies they paid compliments on their toilettes and appearances; in the ears of young men they whispered wit on

the peculiarities of persons present. They enjoyed themselves thoroughly.

Amateur music was one of the means which they provided for the entertainment of their guests; so that when Louisa had performed a song which was new and fashionable enough for every one present to have heard it two or three times before, and Harriette had come to the end of her Brinsley Richards' variations, they asked Miss Bethune to play something. She consented, and began a piece of Greig's. Her playing was very artistic, and it brought many of those who laid claim to a taste for music to the piano. It was at this moment that John Bengough entered the room. There was a hush in the back drawing-room, and there he saw the woman he loved mistress of the situation. He leant back against the folding-doors, and, putting his hands in his pockets, looked, listened, and thought.

Was it too much to hope that this queen of a world of true art and refinement (not the art or refinement of the Clintons) might consent to be his wife? John was naturally of a sanguine disposition, and a fortunate experience—the result of his energy and perseverance—had given him more self-confidence, and he felt that, though the prize would be great, it was not out of the question.

At length the music came to an end, and Bengough stepped up to greet his mistress. But on all sides there was an inundation of musical people thanking her, asking the name of the piece, that of the composer, whether she would be so very kind as to repeat her performance or play some other thing.

An inward tremor, occasioned by the sight of the young Australian, caused Hester to prefer dashing into a fresh and lively piece to farther taxing her voice by replies.

This second piece, "The Norwegian Wedding," was, at general request, repeated. This somewhat annoyed Bengough. He was impatient to say a few words to Miss Bethune in private, and he thought it was not considerate of her to elude him in this manner. He could come to no conclusion as to how much the few sentences which he had spoken on the previous day might have revealed to her of what he had intended saying; but he now began to think that it must have been very little.

At length Hester left the piano, and John hastened towards her. She greeted him kindly, but with some restraint, occasioned by her anxiety to appear as if everything was just as usual; but this he did not observe.

Any private conversation was, however, out of the question, for a young gentleman had followed the lady from the piano and was seated beside her, whence he looked coldly at Bengough.

An impulse to defer the final explanation, however, prompted Miss Bethune to retain him, and she asked him pleasantly whether he sang or played.

He replied that he could neither sing nor play, but enjoyed greatly listening to music.

Miss Bethune answered that it was a pity he did not learn some instrument, as that enjoyment evinced a taste for the art.

To this the young gentleman returned that he often thought of doing such a thing, but that the drudgery deterred him. If one could have arrived at a great rendering of Beethoven in one bound he would have hesitated no longer. As it was, he regretted that he had not been taught as a boy.

Bengough began to grow hot. He thought that never till now had he realized what frightful nonsense people talked at parties.

Miss Bethune, however, took care to include him in the conversation, and the three continued in their corner apparently with no inclination to stir.

A casual observer would have thought them a comfortable and amicable trio, agreeing remarkably in their opinions of the pieces performed.

At length Hester felt that this could go on no longer. She spoke of going. Mr. Lamplough, the gentleman of musical tastes, hastened to summon her carriage. Now was John's time.

"Let me take you downstairs and get your wraps on, so that you may be ready," said he.

To his surprise she drew back.

"Thank you," said she, in a tone as if it did not matter; "but I will wait till Mr. Lamplough comes back; there is no hurry."

"I know there is no hurry," answered Bengough; "still, I ask you to let me take you down."

The situation was developing.

"O, it is not worth while to trouble you," answered Hester resolutely, though she wished that this climax had taken any other shape.

John was silent a moment; then he said, in a voice shaken by the intensity of the words he spoke.

"If you don't let me take you downstairs, I shall never ask you anything else as long as I live."

There was no chance of being overheard, for the Miss Clintons were singing a duet.

"Well, then," answered Hester gently, with perhaps a tear in her voice, "I suppose that is how it must be; but some day," she added, "you will see perhaps that I have been a better friend to you than you give me credit for now."

Now had this been merely a magazine story, we cannot with certainty specify what might have been the sequel; but as it is a page from real life, we have but to state that Bengough returned to work for his fellowship; and this was the end of Miss Bethune's romance.