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THE MISSIONARY BRIDE.

BY C. F. HOFFMAN, AUTHOR OF A "WINTER IN THE FAR WEST."

"Young bride,
No keener dreg shall quiver on thy lip
Till the last ice-cup cometh."

MRS. SIGOURNEY.

The leading circumstances of the following narrative may possibly be known to more than one of my readers; but, if now recognised, notwithstanding the altered guise in which they are here given, I trust they are still so presented to the public as to infringe upon no feeling of domestic privacy.

In the spring of 18—, the Rev. Mr. B—, of —, in Connecticut, received a letter from his old friend and college chum, the Rev. E— T—, who had been for some time established as a missionary in one of the islands in the Pacific, soliciting the fulfilment, on the part of his friend, of a most delicate and peculiar office for him. The request of T—, who, having been long isolated from the world, had arrived at the age of forty without marrying, was nothing more nor less than that B— would choose a wife for him, and prevail upon the lady to come out to her expectant husband by the first opportunity. Strange as it may seem, Mr. B— found but little difficulty in complying with the request of his friend. The subject of missions at that time filled the minds of the whole religious community; and, in some sections of the Union, a wild zeal wrought so powerfully in the breasts of individuals, that they were eager to abandon their homes and their country, and sunder every domestic tie, in order "to do their Master's bidding" in strange and inhospitable lands. Nor was this a mere burst of enthusiasm, that was to pass off with other fashions of the day—for its fruits are still constantly maturing; and now, as then, there are not a few instances of young females of respectability and accomplishment educating themselves for the avowed purpose of becoming the wives of missionaries. With these preliminary remarks I will at once introduce the reader to the subject of the following sketch, with whom I became acquainted in the manner here related.

I had been enjoying a week's shooting at Quogue, on Long Island, when, wishing to return to New York by steam-boat through the sound, I engaged a seat one morning in the stage-coach for Sag Harbour, which sometimes stopped for dinner at nine host's, Mr. Pierson Howell. In the present instance it delayed merely long enough to receive my luggage and myself. The only other passenger was a female, whom, notwithstanding the effectual screen of her long cottage bonnet, I knew to be pretty, from the quizzical look my landlord put on as he shook hands with me at parting after I had taken my seat by her side.

The day was warm; and we had not driven far before, without appearing officious, I had an opportunity of obtaining a glimpse of my companion's face, while leaning before her to adjust the curtains on her side of the coach. It was beautiful—exceedingly beautiful. Not the beauty which arises from regularity of feature, or brilliancy of complexion—though in the latter it was not deficient, but that resistless and thoroughly womanish charm which lies in expression solely. It evinced that feminine softness of disposition which is often the farthest removed from weakness of character, though, by the careless observer, it is generally confounded with it; and which, though sometimes it may mislead one in judging of the temper of the possessor, yet almost invariably, like the ore-blossom upon the soil that is rich in mines beneath, bespeaks the priceless treasure of an affectionate and noble heart. The reader, who would realize the attractions of the countenance before me, need only call up their most winning expression in the features he most admires.

I gradually fell into conversation with my companion, and, stopping at South Hampton to change horses, her first remark upon our again taking our seats, was, that she feared we should not get into Sag Harbour until after dark, when she would be unable to find the ship which was expected to sail in the morning. As I knew that no ships but whalers lay at that time in Sag Harbour, I could not at first possibly conceive what a young and delicate female could have to do aboard of such a vessel; and then, the idea suggesting itself that she might be the daughter or sister of the captain, who came to bid him farewell for his two years' cruise, I asked her if she expected to remain on board the ship till she sailed.

"Oh yes, sir," was the reply; "I go out in her."

"What! to the South Sea?" rejoined I. "You have relations on board, though I suppose!"

"No, sir, I don't know any one in the ship; but I have a let-

ter for the captain, which, I think, will procure me a safe voyage to the — Islands."

"The — Islands! Is it possible you have friends in so remote a place as the — Islands? They must be dear friends, too,—pardon me,—to carry you unprotected so far."

"My husband is there," she answered with some embarrassment, though the growing twilight prevented me from seeing whether the confusion extended from her voice to her countenance. The peculiarity in the young lady's manner, as she pronounced the word "husband," piqued my curiosity; but, as it would have been impertinent to push my inquiries further, I did not urge the subject, but merely remarked, that her youth had prevented me from taking her for a married woman.

"Nor am I married yet," was the reply. "And, indeed," she continued, with a slight tremor in her voice, "I have never seen the man who is to be my husband." An expression of unfeigned surprise, of a more lively interest, perhaps,—for I have said "the maid was fair," and we had now been some hours *te-te-a-te*,—escaped me: I scarcely remember what followed, but before we had reached the inn-door, the ingenuous girl had given me a full account of herself and her fortunes. She was an orphan child, and had been bred up in great seclusion in a clergyman's family in Western New York. She was, in a word, the young enthusiast whom the Rev. Mr. B— had chosen as a wife for his Missionary friend, and prevailed upon to encounter a six months' voyage through stormy latitudes, for the purpose of connecting herself for life with a man she had never seen. I did not express a sympathy that would be useless in her situation, much less did I give vent to the indignation with which her story filled me: her fanatical friends, who permitted a young, a beautiful, and delicate female to take so wild a step, had, perhaps, after all, acted from the best of motives. Indeed, the poor thing herself, though not exactly proud of having been chosen to the station she was about to fill, seemed determined to ~~conquer~~ ~~with~~ all the exalted feeling of one who fulfils a high duty, and who is on the certain road to a perferment which, most of her sex might envy. It would certainly have been a very equivocal kindness to have interposed another view of the subject, and disturbed the honest convictions of propriety which could alone have sustained her in a situation so trying.

I accompanied Alice Vere—for such I learned her name to be—to the vessel; and, after bidding her a kind farewell, I took an opportunity, while passing over the side, to whisper a few words to the captain, which might induce him to believe that she was not so friendless as she appeared to be, and secure her whatever attention it was in his power to offer. In the morning, having a few moments to spare before breakfast, I again strolled down to the pier; but the whaler had hoisted sail with the dawn, and a brisk wind had already carried her out into the sound: nor was it till years after that I heard the name of Alice Vere, and learned the issue of her voyage; though the name, and the features, and voice of her who bore it, did, I confess, long haunt me. It was too pretty a name, I thought, to be changed lightly; and, somehow, when I heard it I could not for the life of me ask that into which it was to be merged for ever. The sequel of her story I learned from a friend, whose vessel being driven from her course in coming from the East Indies, stopped at the — Islands to water, where he casually heard the fate of the Missionary girl.

The tender and imaginative temperament of Alice Vere, though perhaps it impelled her to make the sacrifice for which she was schooled by those who called themselves her friends, but badly fitted her for the cold destiny to which she was condemned. The imagination of any woman, isolated upon the great deep for six long months, with nothing to think of but the stranger husband to whose arms she was consigned, could not but be active, whatever her mental discipline might be. But with a girl of fancy and feeling, who had taken a step so irretrievable when surrounded by approving and encouraging friends, what must have been her emotions in the solitude of her own cabin, when such an influence—such a sustaining atmosphere of opinion—was wholly withdrawn. Doubt and fear would at first creep into her mind; and, when these disheartening guests could no longer be controlled by factitious notions of duty, fancy would throw her fairy veil around their forms, and paint some happy termination of a prospect so forbidding. And thus it was with Alice Vere. Anxiety soon yielded to hope; her future husband and her future home filled her mind with a thousand dreaming fancies. She was no romance reader, and therefore could not make a *hero* of the future partner of her bosom; but a saint he indeed might be, a

saint too, not less in form than in godliness, for the association of physical and moral beauty is almost inseparable in the minds of the young and the inexperienced. She imagined him, too, as one who though not "looking from Nature up to Nature's God," for "God must be first and all in all with him," would still be one whose mind would look from the Creator to his works, with a soul to appreciate all their excellences. The fancied portrait of her future husband was laid in simple though impressive colours, but the background of the picture was filled with all the splendours of a tropical clime, of groves such as the early Christians wandered through in Grecian Isles, and skies such as bent over Him who taught beneath them in the golden orient. True, she was to be exiled for ever from the sheltered scenes and quiet fireside of her youth; but, would she not be contented to rove for ever with one only companion whose soul could fully sympathise with hers in scenes so fresh and so Elysian?

With a mind softened, if not enervated, by these day-dreams, not less than by the bland and voluptuous clime in which they had been for some days sailing, our young enthusiast could scarcely suppress a scream of delight, when, upon coming on deck one morning, she found that the ship had cast anchor in the beautiful bay of —, where her wildest vision of tropical scenery seemed more than realized. The water around the ship was as clear as the mountain-streams of her native country; and the palm-trees and the cocoas that bent over it, lifted their slender columns, and waved their tufted heads against the sky more purely bright than any she had ever beheld; while clouds of tropical birds, of the most dazzling plumage, sailed along the shore, or sported around the vessel, as if wholly regardless of man.

A number of the natives had launched their light barks from the shore, filled with bread, fruit, and other acceptable luxuries to those who have been long at sea. Alice was watching their approach with ~~great~~ ~~interest~~ in the novelty of the scene, when a boat from the opposite side of the crescent-shaped harbour made the ship, and, almost before she was aware of its approach, a striking figure, dressed after the clerical fashion of her own country, in a full suit of black, presented himself at the companion way, and, leaping on deck, instantly hurried towards her. She turned round—looked at him intensely for a moment—made one faltering step towards him, and fainted in his arms.

The gentleman laid her carefully upon a flag that chanced to be folded near; and, still supporting her head upon one knee, gazed upon her features with looks of surprise and anxiety, which soon yielded to complete bewilderment as she addressed him upon coming to herself.

"Thank God!" she exclaimed, gradually reviving; "thank God! thank God!—how can I ever have deserved this?" and, bending her face forward, she impressed a reverential kiss upon his hand, and then covered her face in confusion.

My readers have all read of *love at first sight*, and some, perhaps, have heard of instances of it among their acquaintance. The sceptics to the doctrine, however, I imagine, far outnumber those who really believe in it. It is the latter, therefore, whom I will beg to recollect all the circumstances which preceded this singular scene; when they cannot deem it unnatural that the wrought-up-feelings of an ardent and sensitive girl should thus burst forth upon first meeting in her affianced husband, her appointed friend and protector in a strange land, him that religion and duty taught her that she *must* love,—upon meeting in him all that her dreams of happiness for long, long months of anxious solitude had pictured. I ought to add, however, that the interchange of several letters between Miss Vere and her betrothed before leaving her native shores, had, while partially removing the awkwardness of their first meeting, supplied perhaps that "food for young thoughts" which, in a nature artless and enthusiastic as hers, might engender the most confiding affections even for an object that she had never seen.

"And is this beautiful island to be our home?—Are these my husband's people around us?—Oh! how I shall love every thing that belongs to this fair land! But why do you not speak to your poor wanderer?—Alas! alas! can I ever deserve all these blessings?"

The embarrassment of the gentleman seemed only to increase as the agitated girl thus poured out her feelings. He begged her to be calm, and seemed most nervously solicitous to restrain her expressions; and the captain approaching at that moment, he made a hurried and indistinct apology for his abruptness; and, withdrawing his arm from her waist as she regained her feet, moved off to seek the mate in another part of the vessel.