

POETRY.

THE.

Must rule the earth, he never can die:  
The scorching sun, he never can fly,  
The seasons as they roll,  
He turns the autumn to clay;  
He breathes beauty from decay.

Before him empires rise and fade:  
He censors state and king,  
His scepter hath not a ruthless blade,  
The brightest glory in the land  
Is doomed to tarnish in his hand.

He turns the oozy bed, on which  
Old Neptune had reclined,  
To blooming meadows gay and rich  
With wreaths by flowers twined:  
But what cares he for fertile plains?  
He turns it into sea again.

The attributes of human life  
Are trifles in his eye:  
Beneath his mandate Peace and Strife  
Alternate live and die.  
He brings a balm to wounded hearts:  
He whets a nation's affection.

Oh! fleetly, fleetly glide his hours  
The poet's spirit thrills,  
And heaves his soul in noble strains,  
Or dances in giddy halls:  
But tardily his moments go  
Around the sick-bed fraught with woe.

He lays in dark oblivion's tomb  
The creeds he nursed of yore—  
Orations that new religions bloom  
To feed the hopes of men:  
He strikes his life to stone again:  
He brings it back from out the urn.

His breath consumes the trusty steel  
That formed the victor's blade:  
He crushes underneath his heel  
The bronze our fathers made:  
But can he rob the soil of gold?  
Or make the love for gold?

His power can smother the painter's dye,  
Grind down the sculptor's bust,  
Lash down by builder reached on high  
All lofty with the dust:  
But can his wasting wine erase  
The lines that form the poet's lay?

D. C. S.

LITERATURE.

A FATAL MISTAKE.

Mr. Marshall Chichester had hit upon a very ingenious device for enlivening the periodical holidays which he spent in his duties as a civil servant in India. He was a middle-aged, robust, and of a frugal turn of mind, and the first step he always took upon revisiting his native land was to get engaged to be married to some young lady whose family were in comfortable circumstances. By this device, which he was generally able to live almost free of expense during his leave, thanks to the hospitality of the young lady's relatives; while the duties of his courtship afforded an agreeable relaxation. When pressed to name the wedding-day, Mr. Chichester contrived to be suddenly recalled to his post in India, from whence, after a decent interval of increasing coldness, he would write and break off the engagement—provided, of course, his studies neglected since his departure had not already elicited from the young lady an indignant demand. Obviously this was a very dangerous game to play, but caution was inherent in Mr. Chichester's character, and he never honored with his attention a lady who had brothers in the army or other relatives of the aggressive sex who might be likely to turn up in India. The consequence was that he had hitherto pursued this unworthy manoeuvre with impunity, and he landed in England last summer with the deliberate intention of repeating the experiment.

While he was seeking an opportunity to put his little plan into operation, he chanced to meet one day, at the house of a casual acquaintance, a lady who had been one of the earliest victims of his faithfulness. She was now the widow of a Colonel Lucas, who had recently lost his life under very sad circumstances while travelling in Africa. The *reconnoitre* was certainly a little awkward, but, recollecting that Mrs. Lucas had married with, in a month or two after the termination of their engagement, Mr. Chichester felt less embarrassed than he might otherwise have done. He was completely reassured by the friendly salutation which the pretty widow vouchsafed to him, and when he ventured to renew acquaintance with her, she made no unpleasant allusions to the past but greeted him in a most flattering manner.

At their first interview, Mrs. Lucas pressed him to call upon her, which he accordingly did. It should be explained, however, that in the interval Mr. Chichester had made a discovery which considerably surprised him. It appeared that since her marriage, the widow had inherited in her own right from a distant relative a very considerable fortune. This circumstance impressed Mr. Chichester immensely, for he fully intended one day to marry a rich wife, and it naturally occurred to him that Mrs. Lucas might suit him as well as anybody else. He suddenly remembered, too, that he had always entertained a lingering affection for her, and he did not doubt for one instant that his tender sentiments were reciprocated. He therefore dressed himself with more than ordinary care when he paid the promised visit, and he found the widow surrounded by every evidence of wealth and luxury. She had a pleasant little house in a fashionable neighborhood, and, by subtle process of mental arithmetic, Mr. Chichester derived at the conclusion, while waiting for her in her pretty drawing-room, that she must be living well within her income. This reflection, pleasantly suggestive of a nest-egg of savings, caused him to think more seriously than ever of the idea which had taken possession of him, and when Mrs. Lucas at length made her appearance, looking as it seemed to him, twice as handsome as she had ever been before, Mr. Chichester resolved to lay siege to her heart in earnest.

Considering Mrs. Lucas's marked graciousness and the intimate nature of their former friendship, it is not surprising that Mr. Chichester should have anticipated an easy conquest. He had faith in his powers of fascination, and it must be owned that he was what is called a lady's man. He was slim and gentlemanly with soft, agreeable manners, and an endless flow of small talk. He knew a little about military, could describe a dress or a bonnet with tolerable accuracy, and affected to be an authority on matters of taste.

He soon found, however, that his courtship was likely to last longer than he had hoped. The fact was that the widow's wealth had brought her many admirers, and she had developed an irritating propensity for little flirtation. Whether from coquetry or design, Mrs. Lucas seemed anxious to avoid, or at all events, to delay—a formal proposal, and though she encouraged Mr. Chichester's attentions in rather a marked way, she contrived to keep him at arm's length. He began to be tortured with pangs of jealousy, and far worse than this, his hotel had assumed gigantic proportions, while he made no appreciable progress with his suit. At the end of three months he was still in a state of suspense, and as his leave of absence was about to expire, it was absolutely necessary that he should know his fate.

He therefore one day watched his opportunity, and avowed his passion before the widow had time to thwart him. He was less surprised than dismayed to find that she was inclined to refuse him, but desperation endowed him with such a torrent of passionate eloquence that the lady somewhat reluctantly yielded to his protestations, only, however, upon condition that the engagement should be kept secret. Nothing would induce her to consent to fix the wedding-day, even at a remote date; and she pleaded her recent bereavement as a reason for insisting upon the strictest secrecy. Mr. Chichester had no alternative but to fall in with the arrangement though it considerably detracted from his satisfaction. There were reasons why it was rather important that he should not be absent from his post much longer; but though he pointed this out to the widow, he was unable to over come her delicate scruples.

On the whole, however, Mr. Chichester was, of course, highly elated with this happy consummation. The widow's fortune was, as it were, within his grasp, which reconciled him to the risk he would run of ruining his official prospects by remaining in England. He applied for sick leave, removed from his hotel to modest lodgings, and prepared to wait with equanimity the termination of the period of probation which the widow had insisted upon. But he speedily realized that there were many inconveniences attached to his secret engagement. Mrs. Lucas sternly denied him the ordinary privileges of an accepted lover, refusing even to receive him alone in her house, for fear of exciting suspicion. On the other hand, she did not suffer him to escape from any of the penalties of an engaged man. She kept him constantly in attendance upon her, always taking care, however, to secure the presence of a third party. She organized costly little dinners at Richmond or elsewhere, and insisted upon Mr. Chichester's playing host to herself and her friends. She required to be kept in good humor by constant presents of jewelry, opera tickets, bouquets, and other expensive trifles, and seemed to take a malicious satisfaction in making him spend money. Mr. Chichester groined in spirit, but dared not appear backward in displaying his devotion. He had an uncomfortable suspicion that his hold upon the widow's affections was less secure than he could wish, and he could not reconcile himself to the idea of losing a prize so precious.

In course of time a still more serious misgiving dawned upon Mr. Chichester's mind. Month succeeded month, and the widow continued to prostrate in the matter of their wedding, and showed symptoms of temper when he ventured to remonstrate with her. Her off-hand manner suggested that she had been trifling with him all along by way of revenge for his former treatment of her. The idea was at first so startling that it seemed preposterous, but at length he could not help arriving at the conclusion that he was the victim of a deliberate conspiracy. The proof was that when the news came that his prolonged stay in England had resulted in his losing an appointment in India to which he had looked forward for years, the widow did not evince the least concern, but, on the contrary, exhibited the most unbecoming levity.

This discovery naturally gave Mr. Chichester an unpleasant shock, and filled him with virtuous indignation, but it did not exactly reduce him to despair. He was by no means disposed to fall in with the lady's wishes by terminating the engagement, having long ago made up his mind that if he could not become master of the widow's fortune, he would at least secure a substantial slice of it by way of damages for his dismissal. He was not a delicate-minded man, and did not shrink from occupying the anomalous position of male plaintiff in an action for breach of promise of marriage. Having had this contingency in view for a long time, he had successfully managed to refrain from the widow a letter referring to their engagement, so that if, after all, she jilted him he would have the consolation of revenge.

It being, therefore, now pretty evident that all hope of gaining the lady's hand was at an end, it only remained for him to be patient and long-suffering. That he would triumph ultimately he entertained no doubt, though unfortunately he had in an unguarded moment, dropped an expression which had apparently put the widow on the defensive, since she seemed equally determined not to speak the momentous words.

Mr. Chichester entered into the new phase of his courtship with mingled feelings, though he was conscious that he held the trump card. He foresaw that the lady, being bent upon annoying him, would easily succeed in rendering his life a burden to him. He already had bitter experience of her ingenuity in putting him to expense, and he had too good reason to fear she would continue this very effective persecution. All these dismal forebodings were realized even, more fully than he had anticipated. The widow threw off the mask, and nearly succeeded in driving him to desperation. Mr. Chichester lay awake night after night, and moaned at the indignities which were heaped upon him, and the ruinous expenditure he was forced to incur. The worst of his position was that he had to maintain an outward semblance of devotion, while his soul writhed with anger and indignation. The latent spark of manliness within him was on the point of being kindled into a fierce flame, when, one day, when she was alone, she called upon him, and when she saw that he was alone, she called upon him, and when she saw that he was alone, she called upon him.

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