

TWO PICTURES.

BY HELEN FAIRBAIRN.

"Patients or presents, Doctor?"

The speaker, a young French-Canadian lawyer, smoothed his little black moustache, and showed his white teeth in a smile appreciative of his own alliterative jocularly, as he stopped short in the way of Dr. Clarendon, who was striding rapidly along St. James street.

"Presents, of course. My patients are all convalescent," replied the doctor, with a gleam of amusement in his blue eyes.

"Ha! ha! Good! Very good!" laughed the little lawyer. "You should be at the Bar, Clarendon. But, *mon ami*, speaking of presents, I've a lot more to get yet, and this the day before Christmas. Come into the 'Ichi Ban' with me, there's a good fellow, and help me to get a few. You know," he continued, as they entered the fascinating Japanese store, "there's nothing pleases the ladies so well as something from 'Ichi Ban.' They're all wild about Japanese wares." Turning to the young girl who came forward to serve them, he looked perplexity out of his laughing brown eyes, saying: "I don't know what I want, Ma'am. Show me some pretty little things. Anything you like," with just the faintest possible accent on the "you."

This was a proceeding that extended over a good many minutes, and resulted in the purchase of quite a number of little things, amongst them a beautiful little red and gold tea-pot, a cup and saucer of egg-shell China, a marvellous fan and a Japanese umbrella. Finally, Clarendon wandered away from his friend, leaving him and the girl to decide as to the respective merits of ivory and carved wood paper-cutters. He paused at the other end of the store beside a table, on which lay a promiscuous heap of silk handkerchiefs. Selecting one of fine texture and delicate pattern, he purchased it and deposited the tiny parcel in the breast pocket of his coat. Just then Lemesurier joined him.

"Ready!" queried the doctor.

"Ah, yes; ready!" replied the French-Canadian, clapping his coat over the region occupied by his pocket book. "If I don't get away, I shan't have cab hire to take me home. But did you not invest?"

"I have—to a small extent. I can't afford to let the notes fly like you, Lemesurier. My forefathers weren't wealthy seigneurs."

Lemesurier laughed with a comfortable consciousness of prosperity as the two men left the light, attractive store, and parted company forthwith—the lawyer turning east and Clarendon west. The young doctor passed rapidly along St. James street, through Victoria Square, and up Beaver Hall Hill. On his way up the hill he paused in front of the brilliantly lighted window of a florist's shop. Mist and frost were so thick on the glass on account of the summer temperature within, that only confused glimpses of colour were visible from the street. Opening the door, a flush of warm fragrance greeted him.

Bowls of red and white carnations, pots of pink begonia, with clusters of waxen flowers and thick lop-sided leaves, wreaths of smilax and evergreen, and clumps of every imaginable kind of roses made a summer bower of the interior. Clarendon ran his eye over the fragrant tea-roses, the yellow *Maréchal Niel*, the crimson *Jacqueminot*, the pure white varieties, and finally paused at a jar of pink beauties, great heavy, opening flowers, exhaling a faint perfume. He selected one of the largest, a perfect flower, and handed it to the girl behind the counter.

"Will you have anything with it, sir? A white hyacinth would go nicely. Ten cents each the hyacinths are."

"No, thank you," replied the doctor, "only a little green. Get me a good piece of smilax. Stay! This will do," picking up a piece that lay on the counter. The girl placed the rose on the green, wet smilax—all the flowers and trimmings in the place seemed freshly sprinkled—and wrapped them deftly in white wadding and silk paper.

"Thirty-three cents, please," she said, sticking a pin in the end of the parcel and handing it to the doctor. "Thirty for the rose and three for the smilax. Flowers are *ridiculously* dear, now 't Christmas time," she added, as she clinked the silver into the cash drawer, and stooped to mark the sale in her book.

With his floral purchase in one fur-gauntleted hand, Dr. Clarendon left the tropical precincts of the florist's and emerged into the frosty air of the December evening. A quick walk brought him to his place of residence on McGill College Avenue. Entering his study, he threw down cap and gauntlets, loosened his great coat, and taking from his pocket the parcel, proceeded to divest both it and the rose of their wrappings. This done, he seated himself at the table and abstracted from his pocket-book an envelope, whence he took an ordinary visiting card, which he examined critically. On the face of it, in printed characters, was traced "Miss Edna Gordon," and down in the right-hand corner, "A Friend." On the reverse side of the card, written in the same manner, were the following lines:

The flower, faintly pleading, softly begged for fairer fingers,
And brighter, happier eyes than mine to answer back its light.
To thee, Edna, I consign it, while in its depths there lingers
The blessing for thy Christmaside I breathe in it to-night.

The doctor looked at the lines with a smile—half commendatory, half deprecatory—as young writers are wont to regard their wares. One might wonder why he had written of "happier eyes," as though his own were dulled with grief. Looking at him there in his comfortable, albeit not luxurious, study; handsome, well apparelled; physically, well nigh perfect, and evidently intellectual, one might

suppose he had much of what goes to make up happiness. But the young often like to fancy themselves unhappy, perhaps for the "pleasure of the pain." True, Clarendon feared that his practice was lagging in its growth, and, moreover, he felt persuaded that there were no signs of his ambitions as a *littérateur* meeting with speedy gratification. His reputation as a writer of graceful verse, and strong, sensible prose, was merely local, when, like all other youthful aspirants to literary laurels, he craved for it to be world-wide. However, at this moment, neither patients nor poesy disturbed his serenity. He was evidently peculiarly pleased with his occupation. After duly inspecting the card, he spread the creamy, shimmering piece of Oriental silk on the table, laid the rose in its setting of smilax upon it, and bent for an instant over the beautiful blossom, its cool petals touching his lips. Then lightly folding it in the silk, he enclosed it in the former wrappings, and pinned securely to one end the square bit of pasteboard, turning out the side bearing the name. Hastily buttoning his overcoat, and resuming cap and gauntlets, he took the parcel and left the house. At the corner of McGill College Avenue and Sherbrooke street he turned west, and in a few minutes was close to the objective point of his excursion. Pulling his cap down over his forehead, and turning up his coat collar, with an evident desire to escape recognition, in which he was befriended by the early darkness of the December day, he quickly ascended the steps of a somewhat imposing and evidently luxurious residence. Slipping a loop which he had purposely attached to the parcel over the door knob, he rang the bell, and betook himself with lightning rapidity to the street. After walking a few paces he crossed the road, and, returning, was opposite the house in time to see the butler open the door and remove the parcel from the knob. Then the door was closed and Clarendon walked rapidly homeward. "Pretty work this for a reputable physician," he muttered to himself as he faced the keen, snow-laden wind that whistled along the broad street. "But then," he added, with an amused smile, "it wasn't the physician, it was the poet who did that!"

When he reached home the second time the hall clock pointed to half past five. A faint odour of savoury culinary operations greeted him, and was by no means unwelcome to either physician or poet. Throwing aside his overcoat, he proceeded to make himself comfortable in his slippers and study chair, and was meeting with unqualified success in this praiseworthy endeavour, when a faint ring of the door bell was followed by a knock at his own door, and "A lady wishes to see you, sir!" from the white-capped and aproned housemaid.

"Show her in here," said the young doctor, muttering to himself, "What sort of a case is this, I wonder?"

The "case" confronted him presently,—a quiet, plainly dressed, tired-looking young woman, holding a handkerchief to her temple, who, in answer to his look of inquiry, said simply:

"I fell on the ice and have hurt my head. I think it must be cut."

Placing his patient in the chair from which he had arisen, Keith Clarendon examined the injured forehead. There was a small cut close to the roots of the soft, dark hair. He bathed it gently and staunched the bleeding.

"Will it be necessary to sew it?" she asked.
"Oh, no; not at all. It's not bad enough for that. Not a serious cut by any means. However," he added, kindly, "you must take a little rest here. Your fall has shaken you considerably."

Then, arranging the cushions comfortably in the depths of a capacious easy chair, he bade her test its merits.

"Now, let me get you a cup of chocolate?" he petitioned, cordially.

"Thank you. I should like it very much, if it is not too much trouble," was the reply.

"No trouble at all, I assure you," said the doctor aloud, adding mentally, "What a comfort it is to get an answer like that when one offers to do anything."

He left the room and returned in a few minutes, carrying a small tray covered with a bit of spotless damask, and bearing a comfortable, old-fashioned, white and gold China cup and saucer—the former full of steaming, creamy chocolate, and a plate with a couple of thin, dry biscuits.

"See what it is to have an accommodating landlady," he said, smiling, as he placed the tray on the table before her. "Now, take plenty of time. Remember there is no hurry, and it is bad for you to eat quickly, especially when you are exhausted as at present."

So saying, he left the room once more, and his weary-looking patient nibbled at the biscuit and sipped the chocolate with a wistful look in her grey eyes. When he returned, she had finished her light repast and was leaning back in the luxurious chair, her eyes closed and an expression of perfect restfulness on her face. She looked up as he entered and said:

"I enjoyed my chocolate so much. It was very comforting."

"I'm glad to hear it," was the hearty reply. "Now, I must put a bandage on your forehead to keep the cold out. Lean forward a little bit. There now."

The patient arose from her chair with a sigh, donned her hat, a plain little affair made up of the same stuff as her gown—a sort of strong black serge—drew on her woollen gloves, and lifted her faded mink muff.

"I have had quite a rest," she said involuntarily, the thought forcing itself into speech.

"You were tired?" queried the doctor. "You look tired," he added with a sympathetic intonation.

"Oh, yes. I am often tired." Then, after an instant's hesitation, "I work in one of the newspaper offices. The work is monotonous and not congenial. When I leave the office I am so weary of it!"

"I am sure you must be," responded Dr. Clarendon. "I know it is very wearying. Perhaps, as a physician, you will allow me to advise you a little. You may not be able to follow my advice fully, but do to what extent you can." (The poet was lost in the background now, and the physician had it all his own way.) "Take as much open air exercise as you can get, eat wholesome plain food. Your diet is of the greatest importance when there is such a strain on you. Be very partial to woollen, and avoid cotton clothing as far as possible; never allow your feet to remain cold or damp, and don't be afraid of sleeping too much. You can't have too much rest. Now, as to the wound on your forehead. Keep it well covered lest you should get cold in it, and come back to me on the 30th and let me see it. I leave town to-night on the 8.30 train," he added, "to spend a few days with my own people in Sherbrooke, but I shall be hear again, if all's well, on the 30th."

They had left the room while he spoke and reached the front door. He opened and held it back with a courteous "good night."

"Good night!" responded the girl with one backward look, as she passed out into the driving snow and gathering shadows.

That night, as the train bearing Keith Clarendon homeward sped out of the busy, brilliant station, into the wind-swept darkness of the December night, the young doctor could not refrain from drawing a sharp contrast between the two girls who had that afternoon occupied his attention in such very different ways. Had he possessed Prince Ali's magical glass and used it for a bird's eye view of them at that moment, he would have had a keener realization of how wide was the gulf that separated their lives.

The one, a study for an artist, standing on a Persian rug in a spacious, richly appointed room. Tall, fair, regally beautiful, with wonderful blue eyes, the glow of health and happiness on her face. A mass of fair hair brushed loosely back from a full white forehead, where two or three tiny curls would linger lovingly, and piled high on the small, proudly erect head. A graceful form, robed in a simple dinner gown of some soft material, against whose cream-white folds a spray of smilax and a half-opened pink rose showed in perfect beauty.

The other, seated on a straight-backed wooden chair, in a small, shabby, second-storey back room, her bandaged, throbbing head supported by one thin hand, while the other hung listlessly against the plain black stuff dress. Thin, pale, weary and dispirited, with a hungry look in her grey eyes that would make one long to give that weary spirit the food for which it craved.

II.

On the 29th, after a great deal of snow, the mercury ran up suddenly, and a short rain-fall ensued; but the weathercock veered again on the night of the 29th and shook his tail feathers triumphantly at the balmy south. The north wind roared through the city, making windows rattle in their frames, and the heavy wet limbs of the trees groan and creak as they swayed. The morning of the 30th dawned on a fairy-like scene. The rain had frozen on the trees, encasing trunk, branch and twig in glittering ice. In the morning sunlight the effect was transcendent. The snow on the streets, similarly glazed, was dazzlingly bright. Footpaths and roads shared in the general iciness, and here alone was it an unpleasant feature.

When the afternoon shadows were closing in on the bright, white day, a tired-looking girl rang at the door-bell of a house on McGill College Avenue and inquired for Dr. Clarendon.

"Doctor's not in yet," ejaculated the housemaid.

"Will he be in soon, do you think? I should like to see him. He told me to come to-day," said the girl anxiously.

"Well, yes; mos' likely 'n half 'n hour," responded the maid. "If he told you to come, p'raps you'd best come in 'n wait," holding the door back for the girl to pass in.

She did so, and was shown to a chair in the hall by the smart young housemaid, who vanished to the lower regions through a door at the far end of the hall. There was a gas jet lighted, two or three hats and coats upon the rack, and the atmosphere redolent of roast pork and apple sauce. So much the girl sitting upon the hall chair took in of her surroundings when a step in the porch and the opening of the door made her start. She looked up prepared to meet the doctor, but met instead the inquiring eyes of a young law student, who boarded in the house and whose home was too distant to admit of his spending the Christmas vacation there. He passed on, going upstairs three steps at a time. Soon another young man, this time an insurance clerk, came in and followed the first; then another, and another. Presently the first mentioned came down stairs humming a Salvation Army hymn tune, and arranging his handkerchief in his breast-coat pocket, so that just the right proportion should be visible. He looked at the girl, wondering why she waited there, and passing into the drawing-room, seated himself at the piano and began a vigorous attack upon the keys. Presently he sang to his own accompaniment "Solomon Levi," and then with a very little intermission, "My Bonnie." As he was possessed of a really fine tenor voice, the effect was not unpleasing. The girl sitting in the hall listened eagerly, and when the wily student sang, with pain and longing in his expression, the pleading chorus—"Bring back, bring back, oh, bring back my Bonnie to me!"—the grey eyes were wet.

(To be continued.)