

Literary Selections.

THE PROBATION BY CHESS.

Win her and wear her.—OLD PROVERB.

"Don't be down-hearted, Carl," cheerfully exclaimed old Wilhelm Reiter; "you've made some progress already; and if you only stick to it with a stout heart—who knows—perhaps, before the Rhine breaks up, I shall be obliged to abandon the rook, and give you a knight only."

A quiet smile of conscious superiority involuntarily played over the old man's features, as he put up the pieces for a fresh game, inviting the despondent Carl to try his luck once more; but the trio had had enough for that day, and pleading a headache (the vanquished chess-players best friend) he bid the conqueror good night.

"Good night, Anschutz!" said Wilhelm, as he cordially shook the young man's hand.—"Persevere, lad, persevere, and never mind being beaten at first. Remember the Roman general 'who conquered through defeat.' And harkye! come over to-morrow evening, and we will have another bout. Lina, darling, see the gate fast after Carl."

The farewell between the miller's pretty daughter and Carl Anschutz was somewhat more prolonged than her father's. She accompanied him across the garden, whispering words of solace and hope.

"Tis of no use trying, Lina," said he, despairingly; "I am sure I shall never be able to beat him. You saw how little chance I had against him, even with the rook,—and what fearful odds that makes! Why, it will take years of hard study before I can play with him on equal terms, much less beat him. Oh! it's cruel,—downright barbarous of him to sport and trifle with our happiness so frivolously!"

"Oh! hush, dear Carl, do not say so!" murmured Lina, reproachfully. "I am sure my father loves you."

"Why, then, does he rest his consent to our union upon such a ridiculous, unmeaning condition?" said Carl, angrily. "What motive can he have? After allowing us to grow up together from the very cradle in such intimacy, knowing my circumstances so well, and even desirous, as he told my mother, of seeing us united;—what can be his object I know not, unless it be from a morbid love of his favorite amusement, and a desire to see me appreciate it equally with himself. I like the game well enough, but after all, what is it? Only a game, and not to be made a part of the business of life. To think of beating him, too,—the best player in ——. I shall never do it," and poor Carl smote his forehead with vexation, as he thought of the immense disparity in their play.

"Alas! I cannot guess at his motive," sighed Lina; "to me he has ever been the kindest and most indulgent of fathers. Not a wish I can form but he hastens to gratify it. Rely on it, dearest Carl, there must be some deeper reason than we are aware of, for his acting thus—hark!—Coming, father," she answered as the old man's voice was heard calling her. "Good night, dear! don't despair, and remember,—come what will, your Lina lives but for you."

Carl Anschutz and Lina Reiter had been, as he said, companions from infancy. Their fathers were very old friends, and since the death of Johann Anschutz, which happened when Carl was only nine years old, Wilhelm Reiter's council and assistance had been of the greatest service to his widow, who continued to carry on the small, but thriving farm her husband had left. She, too, had in a great measure supplied the place of Lina's mother to the orphaned babe,—for the good miller's *frau* had died in giving birth to her first child, whose earliest years were spent entirely under her fostering care.

Brought up thus together, it was no wonder that the dawning of youth taught the two playmates to feel that sweet undeniable attraction which adolescence quickened into passion, until at the respective ages of twenty and seventeen the youth and maiden had discovered, by a mutual confession, that life would be intolerable if divided; and accordingly, Carl made his prayer to the old man for his daughter's

hand, never doubting that, as the good miller had always treated him with the affection of a son, he would not now hesitate to make him so in reality.

And truly there did seem no reason to anticipate a refusal. Carl, although so young, was a man grown, and could outwork any laborer on the farm, was temperate, amiable and sincere, and altogether a fine, open-hearted, clever young fellow. But he was deficient in reflection and steady resolution. These defects showing themselves in an extremely plastic disposition, placed his mind too much under the control of others, and sometimes marred the success of an enterprise well begun; but time and experience might teach him the lesson of self reliance. His worldly position, although not equal to that of the prosperous miller, was yet a fair one. Johann Anschutz had left his farm well-stocked, and in excellent condition, and, although the seasons had been unpropitious of late, a few years of patient application and good management, promised to place Carl and his mother above the reach of any freak of fortune.

All this Wilhelm Reiter knew as well as himself, from having been left joint-executor, with the widow, and so, when the old man gave but a conditional assent, depending on so strange and difficult an ultimatum, Carl's astonishment and vexation knew no bounds. The miller listened to his ardent representations with kindness,—professed not the least objection to his prospects, and even encouraged him to the task, but—until Carl had won a game at chess of him, on equal terms, Lina was no bride for him.

Poor Carl prayed, entreated of him to alter his determination, representing, with all the fiery impetuosity of his nature, the strength of their mutual attachment, and the misery he would entail upon Lina and himself by a lengthened separation; but arguments and expostulation were of no avail. The old man mildly but firmly reiterated his fixed resolution, concluding the interview by saying:—

"No, Carl, you cannot alter my resolve, so begin at once, lad; and if you love Lina as you say, I shall quickly see it by the progress you make. You have plenty of talent, and with ordinary application and care, ought soon to play as good a game as I do. Meanwhile, my dear boy, do not think I am acting from sheer caprice. My reasons you shall one day know. You shall have every chance of success; I will even give you regular lessons of instruction, apart from our games,—and to show you that I really wish you to win her, I shall place no restrictions on your intercourse with Lina. Come as often as ever, and the faster you improve the better I shall be pleased.

It was really a hard task old Wilhelm had imposed on poor Carl, for he was known to be one of the best players in the whole district, some said the very best; and Carl had only lately learnt the first principles of the game from him. It interested him as he said, only as an amusement; he had no patience or perseverance to study it scientifically, and now that his happiness depended on the progress he made in its mysteries, he almost hated it, as night after night he reluctantly pored over the books, getting bewildered in the mazes of the different "openings" and their variations, until he went to bed dreaming of undiscovered "gambits," impossible "mates," and "nine queens on the board."

Spring came round, and found Carl much advanced in the game of chess. He was now able, as Wilhelm Reiter had foreseen, to accept the "knight" only, and even with that, won almost game for game. There was as yet little purpose or method in his play,—little of that causality characteristic of the reflective mind; but hope was dawning. He gradually overcame his distaste for the game, and began to see a higher meaning in it than mere amusement. His opponent, faithful to his promise, took pains to teach him, showing the "why and because" of the best moves and their answers, occasionally making a brilliant, though unsound move, which quite upset Carl's combinations, and then, thoroughly analyzing it, showing in a clear, lucid manner how a little cool reflection would have made it fatal to the player.

The effects of this valuable instruction soon became apparent. Carl began to think before he played, to calculate on contingencies, and look ahead for results, although still somewhat impatient, easily daunted by an embarrassing or difficult position in his game, and apt to despair if the tide appeared at all against him.—He fancied, too, that the more progress he made, the better the old man seemed to play also, which of course, was the fact. There was yet much work to be done.

It was very pretty to watch the air of affectionate sympathy with which the sweet Lina would cheer and console her young lover after his constant defeats, as they sat together during the long evening in the comfortable parlor of the mill. Now behind her father's chair, apparently intent on the game, but always watching for Carl's uplifted eye, to greet him with a smile of love and hope,—now seating herself nearer her lover, her soft white hand stealing underneath the table to reassure him by a fond pressure. And if Wilhelm Reiter saw anything of this, or fancied his pretty daughter stayed too long out in the night-air, as she closed the outer gate after Carl, he never said so, or placed the least restraint upon the intercourse, but really seemed desirous for the time when Carl could comply with the condition, and claim his young bride.

Thus the year rolled round, and hoary winter again wrapped the fields in his cold, white mantle. About this time, a law suit which had long been pending between a neighboring farmer and a contractor in Berlin, rendered Carl's presence there as a witness indispensable, and as at that season he could best be spared from farming operations, he intended to make a long stay at that capital. For this Carl had another reason. Berlin had long been celebrated throughout Europe for its chess-players, and he determined to avail himself to the utmost of their instructions. He had now become really fond of the game, and was fast acquiring the qualities of application and patience, so necessary to the successful prosecution of any important undertaking.

Perhaps Wilhelm Reiter guessed at this last motive, for he gave Carl a letter to an old friend in Berlin, who had removed there from —, many years since, and with whom he had fought many a doughty battle over the chess board.

Arriving in Berlin, Carl's first care was to deliver the letter from Wilhelm Reiter to his old friend and comrade Hans König, who received him with great kindness, and insisted upon Carl's staying with him while he remained in the capital. The young man gladly accepted the invitation, which was of the greatest service to him, as being the means of introducing him to many of the first rate players and professors of the game, amongst others the renowned Von der L—, one of the finest players in Europe. This talented master became much interested in Carl, from hearing of his task and its dependant prize, and took frequent opportunities of imparting to him sound and valuable instruction. Carl also frequented the *cafés* and engaged with players of his own calibre. This was of great service to him, for his frequent success with these taught him to feel his own strength, and play with more self-reliance. He devoted his hours of leisure with unceasing application to mastering the more abstruse intricacies of "the wondrous game," and even looked forward to the hour when he might again measure his strength with his task-master.

After having spent nearly three months in Berlin, Carl now hastened to return home, and two days afterwards he again clasped his own dear Lina to his heart.

"That will do for to-day, Carl," said the old man, at the close of a tough game, which Carl had won with the least possible odds; "you are indeed improved. I am afraid you are too much for me, even with the 'pawn and move' only. But come over to-morrow evening, and we will play a game 'even' for the first time. Heyday! you little jade!" exclaimed he, catching the exulting smile that Lina directed towards her lover, as her father paid this gratifying and deserved compliment to the skill of his opponent; "chuckling over your father's

defeat, eh? Come and kiss me directly; and don't think Carl has got you yet, minx. Although," he added, with a half sigh, "I am almost afraid I shall lose you sooner than I expected."

Wilhelm Reiter had indeed found Carl improved, not only in his chess playing, but his whole character seemed to have undergone a salutary change. From the hot headed, thoughtless youth who had importuned him a year and a half ago, he had become a cautious, reflecting man. His mind had acquired firmness and vigor, and the want of self-reliance, once so apparent, no longer showed itself. *The probation had done its work.*

We will not fatigue the reader with the record of the many hot battles which ensued ere Carl triumphed. Doughty and more protracted grew they, for the old man's pride became piqued to find his opponent so close upon his heels, and he played with the utmost caution, every game as yet resulting in his favor. But Wilhelm Reiter was not the pope. In a game where he was sweeping all before him, scattering combinations and taking pieces at a terrible rate, he made an inadvertent move, apparently a very strong one, and threatening to bring the *partie* to a speedy termination in his favor. Carl was sorely puzzled, and for a long time could see no chance of escape. Suddenly his attention was rivited on a particular piece,—could it be? His heart bounded, his eyes gleamed,—stop,—yes,—it is,—it is,—"Checkmate in five moves by sacrificing the queen," he shouted, almost upsetting the board in his eagerness, as, unable to control himself, he sprang from the table, and hugged Lina in his arms.

"Donnerwetter," muttered the old man hastily, "der spiel ist voloren," and lost it was, sure enough, by the masterly series of *coups* Carl had discovered. He shook his head like a terror which has laid hold of a hedge-hog by mistake, and didn't like it,—pished and pshawed a little, but then give in with a good grace, and laying down his huge meerscham: "Thou hast won her fairly, lad," said he, cordially. "Lina, my child, come hither."

The blushing, happy girl advanced, and taking her hand, the old man placed it in Carl's saying:

"Take her, my son, and may she ever prove the blessing to her husband she has ever been to her father. And now, Carl, I think you have long ceased to do me injustice. If I read you aright, you conjecture my motives for imposing such a trial on you. Is it not so, lad?"

The young man made no answer, but the down-cast eyes, and the conscious flush on his cheek, needed no interpreter.

"I see you do," continued Reiter. "It was the anxious wish of your father and myself that our children should cement by the bond of marriage the long and warm friendship existing between us, (if upon arriving at maturity, their feelings should be in unison) and when he was on his death-bed, I solemnly promised him to watch over you as my own son.

"I need not say how much my own feelings were interested in you. As you grew up, I marked with pleasure the mutual affection increasing between you and my dear child, and delighted to contemplate the prospect of fulfilling the dearest wish of your dead father and myself. I saw your many excellent qualities, but I also saw, Carl, much that gave me uneasiness in your character,—grave faults which threatened, if unchecked, to destroy all chance of domestic happiness, and such as I trembled to consign my child to the influence of. Generous and amiable you were,—sincere, honorable, and temperate,—a frugal liver, and an affectionate son.

But on the other hand, there was a want of prudence and caution; your unreflecting and pliable disposition allowed you to be acted upon too much by the judgement of others; you had no self-reliance; more than all, you suffered yourself to be daunted by petty difficulties, for the want of energy and application to combat and overcome them. Nothing but a timely and severe schooling could eradicate these weaknesses which if left to themselves, would have exercised a fatal influence over the business of life and as I had found, by long experience, the wonderfully salutary effect that a studious ap-