

Literature, &c.

From the Illustrated London News.
THE
YOUNG FLAGEOLET PLAYER.
BY MISS LOUISA STUART COSTELLO.

Concluded from our last.

THE consequence of Mr. Ashe having left Paris so suddenly on the evening of his protegee's successful debut, was the receipt of a letter which summoned him to Rouen, to visit a person who had been severely injured by a railroad accident, and who, lying at the point of death, had caused a letter to be written entreating to see him on a matter of the most serious interest to himself. An allusion to certain circumstances, understood at once by Mr. Ashe, excited his curiosity and anxiety to such a degree, that the instant he received the appeal, he hurried away to the place where his correspondent was to be found. He found him in great pain, but perfectly sensible, and able to give the following statement:—

"It is now eighteen years since my wife and I lived with you at Surinam, and had the care of your two children to bring to England after your wife's death. We embarked, as you know, at rather a bad season, but as the fever raged, you desired that these poor babes should escape the scourge which had carried off their mother, and of which you were lying ill at the time, and as I afterwards heard, though the report was false, died. Well, our voyage was tolerably prosperous half-way over, and, indeed, till we were almost within sight of the English coast, when a furious storm came on, and we were driven about without mercy for some days, and at last the vessel was cast a wreck on the shore with only a few of the crew and passengers alive. Amongst these were your two infants and myself; the boy I saved in my arms, the girl was cast ashore safe, clinging to the dead body of my wife.

"We were taken in by some benevolent persons of Liverpool, and there we staid, until I recovered from the wounds and bruises I had received, which were very dangerous. Some months I lay between life and death, and when I got up again it was to hear news of your being carried off by the fever, and of an earthquake having destroyed great part of your property. I did all I could for the children; I informed a respectable merchant of Liverpool of their forlorn position, and he undertook to find out your family in England. A letter, however, came from your half-sister, Lady Lucy Vane, telling him that my statement was untrue, that the children were illegitimate, and that she was the heir to whatever property you might have left. The story was believed before mine, and I had no redress. I could not abandon the children, however, but worked for their support for some time, when I married again an excellent good woman, who, though they were both my own, as I did not like to tell her the truth, as I saw no chance of their ever coming to their rights, and I thought she would love them better if she believed they were mine. I soon after got employ on board ship, and went several voyages, none very lucky; and while I was gone, my wife and the children, for we had several others now besides, went to live in her native village in the Peak of Derbyshire.

"It is now about ten years since I made the unlucky voyage which kept me away from my wife and family so long. I went through hardships in the north seas which I wonder I live to relate. I returned to America, and fell in with the savages, and got so used to their life, that I consented to stay with them, till, tired of that existence, and repenting of not making an effort to return home, I got away, and, taking a voyage from America to the Spanish Main, I accidentally heard that it was a false report of your being dead—that you had been long returned to England, and that you believed your children lost.

"I resolved, on this, to try and find you out, and, on my return to England, I followed your traces wherever I could find a glimpse of you; and, strange enough, lighted at last on the village where my wife was still living with our own boys, but your two children I found gone—one with you, and the other with that very half-sister who would have deprived them of their birthright. I now told my wife the truth, and by her directions, followed you abroad; I was, however, only preparing to go to Paris, when this fatal accident, which occurred from my own eagerness to cross the railroad at a wrong moment, overtook and stopped me.

"By an extraordinary chance, a servant whom you had dispatched to England happened to stop at the place where I was lying sick, and coming to relieve a countryman, by his means I discovered where you were, and got him to send you the letter which has brought you to hear my narrative. Thank Heaven I have at least lived to tell it you."

This singular revolution wrought a great effect on the mind of Mr. Ashe. Thus then, after years of regret, which had rendered him unlike his fellow-men, and had estranged him from society, he found the cause removed, and he had all his wishes realized. His children lived; he had seen them both, had been their benefactor, had rescued his son from a lowly station, and given him the means of attaining fame and fortune; he had discovered in him all the virtues and good qualities he could desire, and, without being aware of their connexion, he had intended to make Edward his heir; but alas! his heart sunk within him as he recollected that of late he had observed but too plainly that a fatal malady was preying on the young man's existence; that, after every triumph of his genius, the progress of decay appeared more

evident; and he was without doubt becoming a victim to an incurable disease, which

"Grew with his growth, and strengthened with his strength."

"I shall tell him he is my son only to bid him an eternal adieu! His nerves are weak, his feelings are acute—the joy, the shock would overcome him. He loves her whom he calls his mother with a child-like fondness; why should I bid him cease to look on her but as a nurse? I have lived enough for myself; it is time I thought on others, and what is anything to me now in comparison to his preservation? Why did I indulge him in this passion for the dangerous instrument which has fostered the seeds of decline in him? Alas! it was I who encouraged, developed his fatal genius which has destroyed itself. And my daughter, my poor Ellen! I have left her to languish in an obscure village; all was selfish that I did, to gratify my own caprice and pleasure, not to benefit the deserving, or I should have at once provided for them all, without seeking to derive gratification from his talent. How shall I repair all the injury I have done?"

Thus musing, the benevolent but eccentric Mr. Ashe returned to Paris, having waited to see the last duties performed for poor Swain, who died in a few days after he had communicated the important intelligence which had so changed the current of his thoughts.

He found Edward very ill; the agitation of the late events, joined to the excitement of his recent success, had produced much fever, which he had in vain hoped would decrease, and thought that by exertion he should shake it off, but in vain; his father, still unknown, saw with agony his flushed cheek, and felt his burning hand.

"You shall play no more, Edward, said he, taking from him the flute on which he was still practising when he came into his room; your health must be attended to before all other considerations."

"But I have engaged to perform to-morrow at the Tuileries," said Edward; "I must not fail—I shall be called capricious, and ungrateful."

"Let them call you what they please," exclaimed Mr. Ashe. "What has a performer's skill to do with gratitude, and what do the public deserve but caprice? Does one of those persons who press into an incredibly small space, half stifled, half stunned, to hear you play, care whether you expire behind the scenes, after he has been gratified! Is it for your benefit or his own pleasure he endures heat and fatigue! What have you to do with the public? You shall play no more—it is killing you. You are my heir; I have already made my will in your favour; you are an independent man, Edward, and can provide for your family without exerting a talent which is fatal to you. I am to blame for having excited it, and on me is the consequence."

"Dear Sir," said Edward, with tears in his eyes, "to you I owe everything I possess—genius, fame, fortune: what had I been without your fostering care? Nothing. But to speak of gratitude to you is useless; I can only talk of affection, which makes us at once equal. But you have raised a spirit which you cannot lay again. The love of fame, the weak longing for applause, if I should call it so, is now too strong within me to be resisted; and not even your commands can quell that passion you have so long fed. Besides, I am not really ill; it is but a passing indisposition; you have not heard its origin, and I have much to tell you of what has happened in your absence. My sister Ellen is in Paris."

Mr. Ashe trembled violently, as he exclaimed, "Ellen!—where?—Let me see her instantly! Explain!"

Edward smiled, "How often," said he, "have you chid me for impetuosity, dear sir; yet I am quite calm, even although I am not allowed to see my sister."

"Who shall prevent it," questioned Mr. Ashe.

"Lady Lucy Vane," replied Edward, "with whom she resides."

"With that woman! with that unnatural sister, who disowned—disclaimed—persecuted my children! with her, who thought to benefit by my death—but whom I have already disappointed. But this, to you is raving. Explain how Ellen comes beneath her roof?"

Edward, considerably surprised at the vehemence of his friend, related as clearly as he could all that had happened.

"And I was then in the box with her, and did not recognize her! Yet her face seemed familiar; but she is much changed—so beautiful—so refined—though she always looked superior to her station as you did yourself, Edward. She must come to us at once. Lady Lucy must have had some motive for carrying her away, depend upon it. Is my nephew to be depended on? He is the son of an artful woman."

"I feel confident in him," said Edward warmly. "He is, I am sure, honour and truth itself."

Before many hours had elapsed, Mr. Ashe had sought an interview with Sir Lionel, whom he found alone, in great agitation, from a recent interview with his mother, who had returned to Paris, having left Ellen at an establishment at Enghein.

When Sir Lionel found that she had placed her protegee out of her brother's reach, from motives of pride, his indignation could not be restrained.

"Mother," said he, "we have probably both done wrong in bringing this young girl from the obscurity in which she was born, but she has now claims upon us which are imperative. We have no right to deprive her of her friends to debar her from seeing her relatives. You have adopted her for her good qualities; is there anything you find in her which has made you repent your generosity?"

"My dear Lionel, you talk like a child," said the lady. "You must know that I took her away from that savage retreat in which she was bred, because I thought she would amuse me when you were away, for I could not have you always with me. As for her good qualities, if I had found her disagreeable, of course I should have sent her away long ago. But, I confess, she disappoints me. I expected she would have made more conquests; she has no ambition, and never aids me in any of my plans, so that she no sooner gets a lover than she loses him, and I have then to begin again."

"She is no schemer, certainly," replied Sir Lionel, somewhat bitterly, "and her merits warrant her attaching some men who would not be caught by a snare."

"Why, Lionel," said his angry mother, "one would say you were in love with the little milkmaid yourself."

"Lady Lucy! my dear mother," answered Sir Lionel, thrown off his guard, "have you then really perceived the truth? Have you seen my heart, and can you pity its weakness?"

Lady Lucy's face became in an instant deadly pale; she gasped for breath, and with difficulty faltered:—

"So this is the end of my folly and indulgence! You dare to tell me to my face that you love a little beggar whom I took up out of charity. But you do not mean to insinuate that you could have thoughts of marrying her?"

"Since I must speak plainly, Madam, returned he, "I have even gone so far as to imagine that might be; but I fear her affections are engaged, and I should plead in vain."

"You will never see her more, Lionel," said his mother sternly. "I have been imprudent to a degree I had not calculated on; but I can repair my error. Ellen shall be sent back to her original obscurity, and disturb my peace no more."

"You will not be so unjust. I have no hope—no thought of her," exclaimed Sir Lionel. "I will absent myself; I will do anything, dear mother; but you must not injure her, I never intended to betray this secret: forgive me. I would not vex you for the world, and I will never take any step without your consent."

"That you shall never have to such a match," sobbed his mother; "never let me hear her hateful name again."

As she uttered these words, she retired, closing the door with violence, a few moments before Mr. Ashe came in by another.

Sir Lionel was so much moved by the late scene, that he had no power to calm his perturbation on the arrival of his uncle, who, entering at once on the subject of Ellen's removal, and insisting upon seeing her, the candour of his nature overcame him, and he could not refrain from recounting to him what had just passed.

"It was my purpose, my dear uncle," said he, "to have sought you out, expressly to relate to you the very circumstance which I would now fain conceal. I loved Ellen from the first moment I beheld her, but I had no reason to think myself otherwise than indifferent to her, yet did I not know of any other attachment. I fear now that such exists, and all my vain imaginings fade to nothing. I had intended to throw myself upon your generosity; to tell you my story, and to have entreated your assistance. I did not then know that Ellen's brother was your protegee, and, as I since learn, your heir. I must resign her, and every prospect of happiness which I was idle enough to cherish."

"Lionel," said his uncle after a pause, "I did you an injustice in disinheriting you for a stranger. I have wronged you in my thought since, but I can, perhaps, yet repair my fault. If you are mistaken—if Ellen does not, in fact, love one another, would you still desire to call her your wife?"

"I have told you I love her," said the young man; "and I could even now cling to hope, but my mother is not, I fear, to be propitiated."

"Let me see Lady Lucy without delay," said Mr. Ashe; "perhaps some arguments I might use will have the desired effect."

The interview which he demanded was granted, and a long conference ensued, which, on its ending, left the lady in a state of great humility and tears, and, to her son's amazement, she exclaimed, as Mr. Ashe brought her into the room to him, as she threw herself into his arms—

"Lionel, your uncle is the most generous of men; he will give our dear Ellen a large dowry, and make us both happy. I have now no reason to withhold my consent."

To increase her son's surprise, he heard her make an engagement to go the next day with Mr. Ashe to Enghein, to engage a beautiful house there, close to the fine lake and baths where Edward could have the benefit of them, and where Ellen was to go at once and reside with her brother, in order that they might enjoy each other's society.

In a short time Mr. Ashe and his invalid son, now obliged, by the physician's command, entirely to relinquish his favorite employment, were established in a pretty villa on the banks of the picturesque little lake of Enghein, on which a boat is always to be found, to afford delight to the occasional visitors who stroll thither from the excursion to Montmorency and its celebrated shades. Many hours of the summer day might the philanthropist and his two children, neither of them conscious in what a close degree of relationship they stood to their benefactor, be seen gliding in the fairy pinnace amongst the small reedy aits of the lake, on whose bosom the warm sun shed its tempered rays; and thus did the benevolent but singular individual make himself acquainted with his

daughter's mind, until at length she hesitated not to confess to him that she no longer cherished an attachment which would interfere with the addresses of Sir Lionel, although of his love she was still in ignorance.

"Had I remained in my original position," she said, "uneducated and uninformed, content with rural pleasures and devoted to rustic occupations, I could have been a fitting companion for Arthur Connor, whose worth and character I still estimate; but I feel now that a great change has come over my mind, and I am quite unworthy of him; I could not share his labour and minister to his wants. It would perhaps, be better for me if I had remained obscure, for I should then have been his wife, and rendered him happy as well as myself. I have, however, been introduced to a different world, and to return to his, for which I am unfit, would be wrong in every way. He will think me right after a few years, and I shall pass the remainder of my life in attending on my dear Edward, and endeavoring, by my devotion to you, to repay, in some degree, our great debt of gratitude. But my brother and I have both a plan, when he is well enough for us to accomplish it—you will not, dear sir, oppose it, I am convinced. We must return to our dear mother: your generous care has given her an independence: Edward and I will live with her in farmer Turner's cottage, and your's shall be that adjoining, where you lived when a happy destiny brought you to our village. Here how blest we shall all live, in tranquillity and content; Edward will recover in his native air, and shall play his flageolet again as in days of yore, before we knew sorrow or suffering."

Mr. Ashe delighted in hearing her form these pictures for the future, and his own imagination followed her's, until she began to hope that the air of Derbyshire, in which Edward had grown up from childhood, would restore him to health and strength. His anxious wish to see his mother was so often expressed, and the probability of their again meeting seemed so much to revive him, that he appeared to receive benefit even from the very prospect. The pure air of Enghein, and the baths, had also considerable effect, and he was, in a short time, able to undertake the journey to England.

Lady Lucy meantime had lost her occupation—her scheme had failed, her manoeuvres had been abortive, and a secret consciousness of her own unworthiness forcibly represented to her by her brother in the interview, in which he informed her that he was aware of her base desertion of his children; all tended to render her very unhappy and discontented. The sensitive delicacy of Sir Lionel had caused him to absent himself for a time from Paris and her he loved, it having been agreed upon between him and his uncle, that should it appear likely that the affections of Ellen were free, he should be summoned to join the party, wherever they might be. He had been informed by his mother of the real birth of Edward and Ellen, but the secret was to remain undivulged till it was the pleasure of Mr. Ashe to declare it.

"And after all, miladi," said Count d'Orfeuille to her one evening at the opera, "that pretty English girl whom you took us all in with, was an adventuress; they tell me she and her brother are both engaged at St. Petersburg for the next season: how came you to be so deceived?"

"Oh! I am so tender-hearted," said the lady; "a tale of distress easily moves me, and I understood she was the deserted orphan of a man of rank. I have provided for her, poor thing, and sent her off with Signor Eduardo, who will appear no more in Paris this season. My son is gone to Rome, and I am left desolate. A widow's is a hard fate certainly; she has no one to support her, and when one has possessions too—entirely in one's own power to leave to who one will—it becomes even more perplexing. I wish Lionel would marry, that I might endow him with all I have, and retire from the world: but he will be rich enough without me. It is a sad life!"

Upon this hint, Count d'Orfeuille spoke, and having clearly ascertained that that Lady Lucy had a very fair fortune of her own, for France, independent of her son, he took his opportunity, which her ladyship was not averse to allowing him, and proposed. She accepted him, although his years were not many more than those of Sir Lionel, and the party at Enghein received to their astonishment a circular, informing that the nuptials were shortly to take place. As Ellen and her brother had both dropped their fictitious appellations, the bridegroom was not aware to whom he was despatching the notice of his approaching felicity.

Sir Lionel heard of the event with extreme vexation, but no representation on his part could change the resolve of his mother, whose soul was now absorbed in preparations for her wedding: her fondness of dress and display having now an excellent opportunity of indulging itself, and a new object being all that her frivolous mind required.

Edward being considered sufficiently strong to bear the journey, Mr. Ashe and his sister set out with him on their return to Derbyshire. With infinite delight they recognized their old accustomed haunts as the carriage took them from the Chesterfield side-gate of Chatsworth park. The moors, the hills, the groups of trees, the foaming river brawling over its artificial bourne, the herds of deer, the fine cattle, and the blue peak in the distance, all interested them by turns, and when they would round the road, and caught a glimpse of their pretty village nestling in the woods, the brother and sister wept for joy.

"How could we ever find pleasure anywhere but here?" exclaimed Ellen; "my mother sees us now—she must hear the sound of the wheels; little Jacob will run to open the gate: all the village will be looking for us."

And as she said, so it was: they were soon received into the embraces of Betty Swain, and

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