

Literature, &c.

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From Chambers's Edinburgh Journal.

THE ONLY SON.

THE Rev. Cyril Danvers was about to ascend his village pulpit to preach his first sermon. A formidable effort was this to the young curate, for he was hardly six and twenty, and of a studious and retiring disposition. He stood in the little vestry, while the old man who fulfilled the combined lay and clerical duties of gardener to the rector, verger, and sexton, arranged his gown with ceremonious care. The tiny cracked looking-glass over the fireplace reflected the young clergyman's face—fair, and pleasant to look upon, but now changing from red to pale, like that of a timid girl. The last verse of the simple, but sweet and solemn hymn, resounded from within, warning the curate that he must muster up all his courage.

A respectful "God be with you, sir!" from the old man, turned his thoughts from his own natural timidity to the high and holy duty he had to perform, and the young curate walked from the vestry to the pulpit, with a pale face, indeed, and a beating heart, but with a quiet and religious feeling that befitted the time and place.

As Cyril Danvers began, his voice trembled, for he thought how much depended on this his first sermon; for on his talents and success hung the hopes, almost the means of subsistence, of a widowed mother and two young sisters; but as he proceeded, the sacredness of his task drove away all worldly thoughts, and he spoke with an earnest enthusiasm that went to the hearts of his simple hearers. Perhaps Cyril felt relieved that they were chiefly of the humbler class, and that his own good, but somewhat cold and stern superior, was absent from his pew, whose only occupant was the rector's daughter, Lucy Morton. We fancy all Lucies must be fair, and gentle, and good; and Lucy Morton did not belie her name, so that the young curate need have feared no harsh criticism from her. He was too lately arrived in the village even to know her by sight; but a passing glance at the rector's pew showed him a sweet face, lifted up with such pious and careful attention, that it gave him courage; and Cyril Danvers ended his first sermon, feeling that the great effort of his life was over, and over well.

He walked to his lonely home through the quiet meadows, that lay sleeping in the Sabbath sunshine of June, with a feeling of calm and thankful gladness, and thought of his future life with less doubt or hopelessness than he had done since the day when the young collegian had been called home to his dying father, to have entrusted to his loving care the three helpless women, whose sole stay and succour in this world was the only brother and only son. What a charm there is often in the words "only son!" Sometimes it conjures up visions of early childhood, unrestrained youth, heirship to broad lands, and everything that undivided love and fortune can bestow. But Cyril Danvers had to prove the darkness of the other side of the subject, when family cares, heavy enough for ripe manhood, overwhelm the youth of an only son, who has so many dependent on him alone, until nothing but love can make the burthen lighter.

However, the young man had borne, and triumphed over many cares; and when at last, a few weeks after the Sunday with which our story begins, he brought his mother and sisters to a small, but pretty cottage within a short walk of his curacy, Cyril felt the quiet content of a man who has done his duty so far, and has reason to look forward to a season of tranquillity and happiness. Most joyful was he in having secured a home for his aged mother, and the two young and beautiful creatures who called him brother. But for him, these would have been thrown on the bitter world in utter helplessness; for, a hundred years ago—the date of our tale, women were but imperfectly educated, nor held the same position in society, which they now justly sustain, and it was almost impossible for a young female, plunged from affluence into poverty, to gain a livelihood by any of the many ways through which unmarried and unprotected women may in our days, honourably and successfully struggle against hard fortune. For this reason, the high principled and affectionate brother murmured not for a moment at his burden, but was thankful that his own hardly-earned salary, and the poor remnant of his mother's dowry, would suffice to keep Frances and Jessie from suffering the bitterness of want.

The summer passed lightly and pleasantly over the curate's little family. There had been time enough to remove the shadow of death, which had overwhelmed them when their father was taken away. The sisters and brother were all young, and in youth, life is so easily made pleasant; even the void which death leaves is not eternal; and now the sole token of him who was gone, remained in the mourning garb of his widowed mother, which she would never lay aside, save for the garments of eternal rest. Light-hearted Jessie sang like a bird once more; was wild with joy at living in the beautiful country; and enticed Cyril from his books, and Frances from her charities in the village, where she and the rector's daughter were the good angels of the poor and needy. Lucy Morton had at first sight liked the curate's eldest sister, and the liking soon became love. Not that they were similar in disposition, for that friendship does

not always require. Lucy's nature was joyous as a sunny summer's day, while Frances was like the same day,—calm, serene, but sunless. Her's was the temperament over which sorrow never passes lightly, and she had one bitterness which her brother and sister were spared: Frances had loved deeply, and truly, and her change of fortune had forever parted her from that love. She did not sink under the loss, but her smiles were less frequent, and more sad; and many of her companions used to say that Frances Danvers, at four and twenty, looked like one certain to be an old maid.

Nevertheless, every one loved Miss Danvers, from the village children, whom she taught to sing—to the wonder and annoyance of the rural Orpheus, a blacksmith, who was wont to lead the church music, showing forth his six feet height, and stentorian lungs in front of the gallery—even to the grave rector himself, who invariably seemed pleased to see the gentle and lady-like Frances as his daughter's companion. Together they visited the poor and sick, often meeting, in their rounds, with the curate himself, on whom devolved much of the pastoral duties of the parish, and whose gentle manners, and earnest but unobtrusive zeal, endeared him every month more and more to the simple people, among whom his lot was cast. In this primitive region there were few above the rank of farmers, so that the rector's daughter, while too gentle to despise her more uncultured neighbors, felt and expressed herself very happy in having found associates of her own age, similar in station, education, and pursuits to herself.

The frank-hearted and unsophisticated Lucy did not disguise her love for Frances, nor the sincere pleasure she felt in the society of Cyril. Her laugh was gayest, her sweet face brightest, when he was by; until the student ceased to shut himself up with his books, and his countenance wore a look of continual happiness which gladdened his mother's heart. All the winter, the four young people met almost every day; and it was only when the spring brought to the rectory a visitor, who took away a slight share of Lucy's society from them, that the curate and his sisters began to think how dull their little parlour was without the bright smile and cheerful voice of the rector's daughter.

Miss Hester Dinsdale, Lucy's guest, was one of those plain but attractive girls who make tact, good sense, and good nature atone for the want of beauty. She was very lively and open-hearted: too much so, perhaps, for she had a way of telling unpleasant truths, and of cutting remarks, which she called speaking her mind, but which was often anything but agreeable to the feelings of others. Penetration discovered at once the state of things between her friend Lucy and the Danverses, and a few pointed words at once tore the veil from Cyril's heart, and while he saw he trembled.

"Why are you so thoughtful, Cyril?" asked Frances one evening after she had for some minutes watched her brother, who sat with a book on his knee, though evidently not reading.

Jessie started up and looked over his shoulder. "Why, he has been sitting here an hour and has not even turned over the second page! A pretty student is my clever brother becoming," said the laughing girl, shaking her curls in his face.

Cyril was confused. "I fear I am getting lazy, Jessie; but I have so many things to think about and to do."

"And is that the reason you have been so grave lately? Why, Cyril, I have hardly seen a smile on your face since—yes, ever since Hester Dinsdale came."

"Is that the grand era, then?" said her brother, forcing the long absent smile to his lips.

Jessie looked very wise. "Ah, I see how it is!" she answered in a sedate whisper. "I know what has come over Cyril Danvers—he loves some one!"

"Yes, I love my mother, and you, little torment!" interrupted the young man quickly, as he stooped over his kneeling sister and kissed her cheek, so that his face was hidden from her view.

"What! and not Frances too?" archly said Jessie.

Cyril turned a look toward the elder sister, a look needed no words; it was evident he loved her even more than he did the gay damsel of eighteen, who was ever the pet of the family. Then he took up his book, and went into his own room.

The gay girl had touched a chord that vibrated fearfully in her brother's heart. Cyril did love, and love passionately; and he knew it was all in vain; for how could he hope to marry? Even had Lucy loved him—he never thought she did; but even had it been so, how could he tear from his heart and home those dear ties, without which cruel severance he could not hope to take a wife.

The strife was very bitter in the young man's bosom. He had been so happy with his mother and sisters, and now it seemed that they stood between him and the girl he loved, so that, without sacrificing them, he could never hope to marry her. Sometimes he felt thankful that Lucy seemed not to love him, or the struggle would have been harder still. But then she regarded him kindly—he might soon have gained her love, had he dared; and her father was a kind, good man, who would not oppose his child's happiness. Then poor Cyril felt at once from his pictured dream, he thought of his deserted sisters, alone and unprotected by the shelter of a brother's love, knowing that his income and his home were

now the right of another, and they were desolate. He could not be the cause of this—not even to win Lucy.

No wonder was it that such an agonizing strife in his heart made Cyril's face mournful, much as he strove to hide his feelings from every eye. But it was terrible to have at times to struggle with the bitter thoughts that would rise up against the innocent ones who knew not how much he sacrificed for their sakes, and to be in the presence of her who had awakened this passionate and fatal love, was almost more than the young man could bear. He would have sunk under the conflict, but that it did not last long.

One day Hester Dinsdale came to announce her sudden departure, and Lucy was to return with her for a twelvemonth's visit to London; and the two girls had come to bid an abrupt adieu to the cottage. Frances was rather pained to see that her sweet friend Lucy so little regretted the parting. She might have been more sad, but then she was so young and gay, and was going to so many anticipated pleasures! When Lucy kissed Mrs Danvers with a tearful adieu, Frances forgave her at once for looking so happy. Cyril saw nothing, felt nothing, except that Lucy was going, that his heart was riven with despairing love, and that he must conceal it.

Frances and her brother walked home with them, in the twilight, across the still meadows. Cyril felt as if dreaming. He only knew that Lucy's hand trembled on his arm, and that her downcast face was sad as she spoke of her departure.

"Are you sorry to leave us?" asked Cyril in earnest tones, that mocked his attempts to conceal his feelings.

Lucy did not speak, but one large tear fell on the handful of bright flowers which Mrs Danvers had, for the last time, gathered for her favourite.

Another moment, and Cyril would have forgotten all his resolves, and poured forth his impassioned love; but Frances unconsciously turned round.

He saw her pale, languid, though beautiful face, and the weakness was gone. The son and brother would not forsake his duty even for love.

When, after a passing silence, Lucy's voice beside him sounded cheerful as ever, Cyril thought with a stern joy that his love was unreturned, and became calm once more. As they parted, he looked with one fixed gaze of intense affection in her face, half raised her hand to his lips, then relinquished it without the kiss, drew his sister's arm within his own, and turned homeward.

For many weeks after Lucy had departed, the village seemed desolate indeed. So the curate's sisters felt and said; and Frances, with a quick-sighted earnestness, given by her own olden love, watched her brothers every look. But he seemed calmer than usual, spoke of Lucy in his usual tone, read her recent letters, and even sent some few kind messages in answer to hers.

The anxious sister was deceived. Concealment was impossible in her own womanly nature, she felt satisfied that she had been mistaken, for Cyril never could thus have hidden his love. She knew not the extent to which love can give strength of purpose.

It happened, too, that before very long another subject engrossed the thoughts of the tender sister. The gay and beautiful Jessie gained a lover; one who had seen her at the village church, wooed, and won her; for he was comparatively rich, handsome, and good withal, and worthy to be trusted with the youngest darling of the family. So in a few months Jessie Danvers became a bride.

There is always a vague sadness attendant on the first wedding in a family. It is the first tie broken, the first bird that leaves the nest to venture, on half-fledged wings, in a world untried. Mrs Danvers wept almost as much at her daughter's wedding as at her husband's death. Frances, too, was sad: it brought back her own love sorrows—unspeakable but still unhealed. Cyril only seemed cheerful, he was sorry to part with his sister, his pretty plaything from boyhood. But then Jessie was so happy; she loved, and was beloved; and the brother acknowledged to himself, without feeling it to be a sinful thought, that thus one bar had been removed from between himself and Lucy Morton. Cyril knew that she was still free; for she wrote unreservedly to Frances; and the delicious hope would come oftener and oftener to his heart, that sweet Lucy might be his wife after all. The young curate was always delicate in health; but now renewed hope lent a colour to his cheek, and a firmness to his step, so that when Frances left the village to visit the bride, she only quitted one happy home for another.

As the affectionate sister looked upon Jessie's beaming face, and remembered Cyril's cheerful adieu, she felt glad that there was still happiness in the world; though, in her own bitter loneliness, she thought of the past and wept.

The time did not pass wearily with Cyril and his mother, even though the visit of Frances extended from weeks to months. Her letters, too, had a cheerful, hopeful tone, which cheered them both, and Cyril, who knew not how deeply that sad first-love had entwined itself with every fibre of his sister's heart thought with pleasure—in which it surely was hardly wrong if one selfish idea combined—that there might come a time when Frances too would be a happy wife, and his own reward for all he had sacrificed might be Lucy Morton's love. Thus Cyril would dream, as he sat by his winter fireside, and thought how that fireside would look with

his aged mother in her arm chair, and a young wife in the other, who wore the sweet face of Lucy Morton, until his countenance seemed radiant with joy, and Mrs Danvers would rouse her son from his reveries, to ask him what he was thinking about to make him look as happy.

When winter was stealing into spring, Frances suddenly returned. They had not known of her coming, and both mother and brother gazed on her face with wondering delight. She was still pale, but there was a soft light in her blue eyes, and a tremulous smile playing about her mouth, that told of some happy secret. After a few hours, Frances said, with a deep blush, that made the transparent cheek glow, until the once sedate Frances looked as beautiful as Jessie: "Dear mamma! shall you be glad to see an old friend?—Charles—that is Mr Wilmington—said he should be passing Elmdale to-morrow; and—"

Frances could say no more, her arms were thrown round her mother's neck, and then the blush and the smile ended in tears more delicious still. The secret was told: she had again met him, so long remembered; death had claimed the harsh father on whom he was dependant; and Charles Wilmington was free to woo and wed his early love, so the gentle Frances was not destined to be an old maid, but a happy wife, and that ere long.

"Why did you not write to us of this, my most mysterious sister?" asked Cyril, when he had given his warm, brotherly congratulation.

"Because—because I thought I would rather tell you; and you know good news will bear delay," said Frances, laughing and blushing.

"Then I had better delay mine, but no, I must tell you: old Mr Calvert died last month, and I was this morning greeted as rector of Charlewood!"

"What! the pretty village close by? I am so glad my dear, dear Cyril, how happy you will be, cried Frances joyfully!"

"How happy I am," answered her brother, and no one who looked on his radiant face could doubt it.

The brother and sister took their old twilight walk together through the green meadows that led to Elmdale. They were too happy to talk much, but they breathed the soft evening air, and looked at the tinted clouds, and thought—as hundreds of young hearts have done, are doing, and ever will do—how pleasant is the evenings of spring, and how sweet is it to love! Suddenly from the old church of Elmdale, came the cheerful sound of marriage bells; Cyril and Frances glanced at one another, with that beaming, half-conscious smile and free masonry of love.

"Who are those bells ringing for?" asked Cyril of the old sexton, who was hastily crossing the field.

"Don't you know, sir? but master went away, and told nobody, I think. It is Miss Lucy, she was married to a grand London gentleman yesterday morning."

"Then that's the reason she has not written to me so long," said Frances, as the old man walked quickly away. "But Cyril—Oh! Cyril!" the sister almost shrieked, as she turned and saw the fearful expression of her brother's face. In a moment Frances read the tale of hidden, self-denying, and now, hopeless love. Without a word she led him to a bank, for he could not stand, and there, with his sister's hand in his, and her face bending over him in fearful sympathy, Cyril gave way to all his love—all his despair. Merrily the wedding bells rang on: they sounded now like a funeral knell to the two, who went home through the gathering darkness. The gloom without was nothing to that within the heart of both. How all things had changed in one little hour.

Charles Wilmington came, but his affianced bride met him with a welcome, in which there was more of sadness than joy. Frances wished to defer the marriage; but Cyril would not suffer it. He gave his sister away to her long faithful lover, and tried to congratulate them, and to smile cheerfully, but it was a mournful wedding. Frances felt that her presence gave Cyril an additional pang; her own happy love was too strong a contrast to his desolate sorrow. The sister saw that it was best that she should go; yet as the carriage whirled her away, ever and anon that pale, agonized face, floated between her and the husband so dearly loved; and amidst her bridal happiness, Frances mourned for her brother.

Cyril and his mother were now left alone together. He had exacted a promise from Frances, that neither his fond mother nor Jessie, should ever be pained by the knowledge of his fatal secret; and so Mrs Danvers came to live at Charlewood Rectory with a feeling of unmixed pleasure and hope. Sometimes she thought her son looked sadder and paler than he had done for some months; but then Cyril was always grave, and never very strong. His new duties also took him so much away from her; for he was none of those idle shepherds, who think one day's tending in the week enough for the flock. And Cyril, however weary he came in, had always a smile and cheerful look for his mother. He was too gentle and too good to make her suffer for the deadly gloom which had fallen over his whole life: it was not her fault, nor that of his innocent sisters, that he had lost sweet Lucy Morton.

That name now was never breathed, save by Cyril himself, in the lonely hours of suffering, of which no one knew. She did not revisit Elmdale, but went abroad with her husband. Change of abode happily removed Cyril from many haunting memories of his loss.