

Literature, &c.

THE SPIRIT OF THE MAGAZINES.

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MY COUNTRY COUSIN.

BY MISS MARY E. THROPE.

CHAPTER III.

THE lovely girl, how I had wronged her. I gave her my hand, contrived to get her away from my cousin, walked with her, talked my best to her; but when I turned round to see why she answered Yes instead of No so often, I found her intently regarding my cousin, who was carefully putting the flower she had given him into one of the buttonholes of his coat. Simpleton! I might have known better: was it natural that she should prefer the society of an old woman to that of a young man? I repaired my error, of course. On our way home we met Laura and Eleanor Sherwood, who invited us to a party at their house for the evening after next. Ah! this reminds me that I had forgotten to mention that the evening for our party came and went unsignaled some time ago as the poet had not made his appearance.

As the girls and myself were sitting alone in the parlor early next morning, we heard the ever welcome postman's ring. Annie flew to the hall, and in a few minutes returned with a couple of letters, which she held high above her head, playfully exclaiming—

'Here they are, Miss Featherstonough, bearing the motto of thine own true knight, 'God and my fair ladye.''

Miss Featherstonough sprang eagerly forward and snatched them from her hand; but on glancing at the superscriptions, and seeing that neither was for her, her brow darkened, and with a sudden burst of passion she dashed them on the floor; then turning to the startled Annie, with anger glowing in every lineament of her face, exclaimed—

'Do you consider that a joke, Miss? If you do, let me tell you that I consider it an insult.'

'Oh, I beg a thousand pardons! I assure you I did not mean to offend; I only did it in fun.' But without heeding Miss Featherstonough brushed past her and left the room.

'Oh, Aunt Debbie,' said the distressed girl, 'what have I done?'

'Nothing, my dear; at least, nothing to merit such an ebullition as that: think no more about it.'

'Oh yes, Aunt Debbie, it certainly was very wrong in me, very; I must go and tell her how sorry I am.'

'Not now, my dear; do not go now; it will not avail: besides, I have a commission for you to attend to immediately, if you will, so that you may be back in time for breakfast.'

What the commission was, my readers poor old bedridden Nancy Brown, who lives in the cot in the opening at the head of the glen, may tell you herself, if she chooses; it is enough, for the present, to know that it diverted Annie's mind from the contemplation of a disagreeable subject, pleased Nancy, and left me to ponder uninterrupted over Miss Featherstonough's sudden and surprising manifestation of ill temper, which I regretted, especially as my cousin's eyes and manner had of late evinced something more than friendliness when directed towards her, and unless my old eyes and specs deceived me, that something was reciprocated too. If a lasting attachment should spring up between them—Oh! I could not think of it: my cousin, with his simple domestic habits and warm heart, could never be happy with a woman reared and educated solely for the world of fashion, even although her temper was serene and changeless as a summer sky. Had I better make him the warder and the watchtower of his own heart, by narrating to him the incident of the letter when he came in? No, I could not do that. I had learned Pope's verse—

'Teach me to hide the fault I see,' &c., too thoroughly in my youth to be able to violate it in my old age. Right or wrong I must let things take their course. But then such a thing might not occur again until it was too late. My poor cousin—he certainly was too good for Florence Featherstonough. Too good for Florence Featherstonough! My country cousin! I almost fancied the spirit of the proud mother before me in the loftiness of her avenging wrath. Rest tranquil in thy ignorance of the fact, Fanny—secure in thy fancied elevation. Be assured thou art not alone in thy error. I have met many another in my walk through life who, like thee, chose to assume a superiority over men who, in their calm pride, would not condescend to notice thee or thy airs, save by a quiet smile of pity.

A quarter of an hour later, when we all met at breakfast, Annie was conciliating to Miss Featherstonough, and Miss F. was in return—shall I say it?—sulky. My cousin soon perceived that something was wrong, and with a tact and delicacy that I could not but admire, introduced such interesting topics of conversation, and in spite of monosyllabic answers at first, maintained so perfectly his own even, kind, and agreeable manner, that we soon yielded to its influence, and the delightful tone of our intercourse, so rudely dashed aside for the moment, flowed back into its accustomed channel again.

CHAPTER IV.

'Trifles make the sum of life.'

'What a beautiful rose colored tissue!' said Miss Featherstonough, stopping to look in at Turner's window, on our return from a shopping expedition an hour later the same morning. On examination we found it to be of such delicate texture and exquisite coloring, that Miss Featherstonough concluded to purchase a dress for the Sherwood party. I urged Annie to get one also, but Miss Featherstonough thought it would not be becoming to her.

'Let me try, Annie,' said I; and I gathered it into folds and threw it over her shoulder. I thought the effect beautiful over her white dress, and appealed to my cousin.

'What do you think, my cousin?'

'That anything would be becoming to Miss Logan.'

A bright blush suffused Annie's face and neck with fine effect, and she looked lovelier than ever in her embarrassment, as she hastily removed the tissue. I turned triumphantly to Miss Featherstonough. What a look! Could it be possible she was still angry? I rubbed my specs and looked again, but the hateful expression was gone; she was looking at some fine blonde lace. It might have been merely a contraction of the brow caused by a sudden pain, or, I might have been mistaken, possibly; dim eyes with spectacles before them are by no means infallible. After buying another dress, and some blonde lace to trim both, we returned home. Never was Miss Featherstonough more fascinating than during the remainder of that day: she read to us, played, sang for us, and obliged us in everything: in a word was all we could desire, and the hours flew by on 'golden wings.' The next day, in like manner, passed delightfully away until seven o'clock in the evening, the time fixed upon for the dresses to be sent home, and they were not forthcoming. Half-past seven struck, and still no dresses. Then the girls went up stairs, at my suggestion, to get themselves in perfect readiness, so that they might not be detained when they did come. Eight struck, and I sat down to dispatch a note to the mantu-maker, when a loud ring was heard, and the next minute a young woman entered the parlor in great haste with the dresses.

'Sit down, my good girl, and rest,' said I. 'Jane go up to the young ladies and ask them to come down here and put on their dresses, so that they can have the advantage of the large mirrors. Tell them my cousin is in his room writing, and they need not fear interruption.'

In a few minutes the girls came down. To draw off their wrappers and put on the dresses was the work of a moment; but the hooking was another matter, as I found to my cost when I tried, and pulled, and tried again to hook Miss Featherstonough's, but without success. In the midst of my exertions, I was surprised by a merry, uncontrollable burst of laughter from Annie, and, looking round, I saw her in front of a mirror regarding her image with a half vexed half amused expression: then catching my eye, she burst out laughing again. No wonder! there she stood with sleeves so tight that she could not move, her arms hanging out from her side as if they did not belong to her, and her round slender waist magnified by the loose, awkward-looking body almost to the size of mine, fitting, as Jane said, like a 'shirt on a beanpole.'

'Why! Annie!' exclaimed I, forgetting my own task in my astonishment, and going towards her, what in the world's the matter! there must be some mistake here; surely Miss Flinn could never have made such a blunder as this; this body must have been made for some one else. Did Miss Flinn make any other dress of this material?' said I to the young woman, who had taken my place and was endeavoring to fasten Miss Featherstonough's dress.

'Yes ma'am; she had one to make for Miss Hall; but Miss Flinn has been too sick to see to the work herself these two days, and I'm afraid the parts of the dresses must have got mixed.'

Probable enough, thought I, for Miss Hall was anything but a sylph. All this while the young woman was tugging away at Miss Featherstonough's dress. After incredible exertions, and by dint of superior strength, she succeeded in hooking it at last. Miss Featherstonough went to the opposite mirror to see how it fitted.

'Oh, very nice indeed! it was a little too tight, certainly; but then it would stretch: true it was rather wanting in length, but she did not mind that; and she glanced down at her small feet in satin boots, which were visible, even to the pearl anklets, with considerable complacency. Just then she reached up her arms to readjust a braid which had fallen from its place, when rip, rip, rip, away went the hooks, one after another, all the way up the back. Miss Featherstonough stood still a moment, as if stupefied; then, tearing off the dress with such violence as to make great rents in the gossamer-like fabric, she crumpled it together between her hands, and dashed it at the poor girl, exclaiming passionately—

'Take that thing back to your mistress, and tell her to make the best of it, for it's all the payment she will ever get from me.'

The poor girl looked shocked, confused, and gathered up the dress, irresolute whether to take it or not.

'Do you hear me? Take it back, I say, and tell her what I have told you! and, with flashing eyes and head erect, she swept out of the room.'

'Never mind,' said Annie, coming to the young woman's relief, 'leave it; it can easily be altered: mine will do very well too, with a little taking in under the arms—(a little!)—do not say anything about it to Miss Flinn; and as to payment, that will be all right.'

'Annie, my dear,' said I, 'do go up stairs and get ready; put on something as soon as you can, for we shall be late. I will attend to every thing here.'

After effectually comforting the young woman, I sent her away, and seated myself to wait for the girls, when my cousin joined me exclaiming—

'What a pity, Cousin Debbie! Oh! what a pity!'

'Why, where were you?'

'Just outside, on the piazza; so near that I could not but hear all perfectly. I did not know what was going on until it was too late to make my escape without being seen from the window near which Annie stood, so I remained quietly where I was.'

'But I thought I left you up stairs writing?'

'So you did; but thinking it must be time to go, I lighted my cigar and went down to the lawn, so as to be near when the young ladies were ready. After walking to and fro some time, I came and seated myself in the piazza, and soon became so lost in thought that I heard nothing until Annie's laughing arrested my attention. But such passion in one so beautiful, so exceedingly attractive, isn't it deplorable?'

'Very.' After a few minutes' pause, he continued—

'Do you know that I had serious intention of trying to induce her to become your cousin?'

'Heaven forbid!' said I, with more emphasis than I intended: 'whatever you do, study well the character of my future cousin before you make her your wife.'

'I will, I must; but oh! Cousin Debbie, would you believe it—could you have dreamed of such temper in Miss Featherstonough? Did she not seem nearer perfection to you than any other human being?'

'Whatever she may have seemed hitherto, we now know what she is: let us profit by this lesson, and look beyond mere beauty henceforth, so that we may not be disappointed. But I must go and see after the girls; it is nine now; we shall be even more than fashionably late if we do not hasten.'

'There will be no going to Sherwood's tonight, I imagine.'

'Oh yes, we must go—some of us, at least or we should offend irremediably. I will go instantly and see what can be effected.'

To my surprise and pleasure, I found Miss Featherstonough completely dressed in a superb light blue silk, embroidered with white flowers and trimmed with pearls; while Annie, in her wrapper, was arranging some jewels in her hair.

'Fly and get ready yourself, Annie.'

'Yes, in an instant; as soon as I fasten this braid.'

'What will you wear?'

'Oh, I have a spotted muslin that will do very well; I shall soon be ready.'

And in a few minutes she did make her appearance in the spotted muslin, without a single ornament of any kind, except a few natural flowers wreathed through her hair, adorning the crown of beautiful curls God had given her.

'The dahlia and the lily of the valley,' whispered my cousin to me as they joined us in the parlor a few minutes after. We were soon at Sherwood's and Miss Featherstonough, in her rich dress and peerless beauty, shone pre-eminently the belle of the evening. The beaux of the village vied with each other in rendering homage to the elegant stranger. She was in her element; all smiles, all sweetness; and no one, in looking at her, would have dreamed for a moment of the storm that had so lately ruffled the harmony of that angelic countenance. The magnificent creature! she sparkled like a diamond among pearls. My cousin, too, I am proud to say, came in for his share of admiration; he was quite a lion among the ladies. I observed with pleasure that he went about talking with neglected young ladies, and sending partners to the wall flowers decorating the room. I did not see him go near Miss Featherstonough but once during the evening; it was unnecessary she was surrounded by admirers. Annie, in her usual self-sacrificing spirit, played most of the evening for the dancers, and would in all probability have sat at the piano all the evening, had not my cousin called my attention to the matter by asking me if I knew of no one who would take her place. I soon found a substitute, and it was well that I did so, for I saw when I came up with my reinforcement, that poor Annie was almost ready to faint with weariness in the close air of the excessively warm room. I led her to a window; my cousin brought some refreshment, and we lingered near it talking together some time.

While there, Miss Featherstonough approached us, leaning on Fred. Foster's arm. She chatted gaily with Annie and me, but I observed that she did not once address my cousin. My cousin smiled as he noticed Fred's evident delight at her graciousness, and, as they passed on, whispered, half sorrowfully I thought, 'Would that she were as lovely as she seems!'

Before leaving, I persuaded the young folks to fix upon a time for our own party. After some consultation, the evening of Friday week was agreed upon. On starting for home, Miss Featherstonough came and took my arm instead of my cousin's. This was something new. Was she resentful? Next morning

Miss Featherstonough was quite cool to my cousin, who left, immediately after breakfast, to go to the city on business. He did not get home in the evening, as he expected, but remained till the close of the next day. How lonely we are without him, and how much we missed his cheerful face and pleasant voice! Miss Featherstonough did nothing but yawn and exclaim against the stupidity of female coterie. On the evening of the second day, Miss Featherstonough espied my cousin returning, from the piazza, and she even condescended to go half way down the steps to meet him. Annie, who had been her own sweet obliging self during his absence, remained where she was, just inside the parlour window, reading, until after having greeted us both, he inquired eagerly after Miss Logan. Then she stepped out, smiling, but blushing a little, as he hastened towards her, his fine frank eyes glowing with pleasure. My cousin had not forgotten us in his absence, as some books which he brought for Miss Featherstonough, some music for Annie, and some fine exotics for myself, amply testified. That was a delightful evening we spent together on my cousin's return, and it would have passed without a shade of unpleasant feeling to mar its harmony but for the visit of a couple of ladies from the village, who, when Annie and Miss Featherstonough played for them, lauded the performance of the former greatly, without evincing the slightest admiration for that of the latter. The truth was, they preferred Annie's playing because they were more accustomed to her style, and comprehended it better than Miss Featherstonough's, which was the result of so much science and skill. Miss Featherstonough was displeased, and then, while under the influence of the 'green-eyed monster,' spoke disparagingly to my cousin, not only of Annie's music, but of Annie herself. This was the finishing stroke.

My cousin recoiled from this manifestation of moral meanness even with its extenuating circumstances 'staring him in the face,' and Miss Featherstonough lost irremediably the last hold of the ascendancy she had once possessed over him. Ah! if we could only impress the truth on our minds that good policy alone, if not principle, requires us to speak well of our fellows, how much evil we might prevent in the world! Blessings on the one who has written—

Nay, speak no ill—a kindly word

Can never leave a sting behind;

And oh! to breathe each tale we've heard

Is far beneath a noble mind.'

Let us promulgate it, one and all, for it is worthy.

Pardon this little digression, dear reader, and forgive my moralizing, in consideration of my age and experience.

The next morning my cousin, who is an uncommonly excellent reader, read to us from 'Hyperion,' and I noticed then for the first time, and often afterwards, that, whenever he read anything touching or beautiful, it was to Annie's expressive face that his eloquent eyes glanced for sympathy. I saw him more than once, when Miss Featherstonough called him to accompany her in our daily excursions, direct a lingering look to the modest girl at my side. He even maneuvered, and occasionally with success, to secure her for a companion. Miss Featherstonough was quick to notice the change, and I saw with pain that she visited her chagrin and mortification on the unoffending Annie. She chose to consider her an inferior, and assumed a superciliousness of manner towards her that was as inexcusable as it was unmerited. Without being positively rude, she managed to annoy and grieve her in various ways. Annie endured patiently and quietly, but she seemed to feel deeply. I tried to restore peace for a while, but finding it impossible, and remembering that Miss Featherstonough's visit was nearly over, I contented myself with screening Annie as much as I could, while my kind hearted cousin redoubled his attentions.

Meantime, the evening for the long deferred, long expected party arrived. Everybody came, and everybody seemed happy. Miss Featherstonough was splendidly attired in lace, satin, and jewels; while Annie, in her simple becoming dress, looked lovely—the very embodiment of youth, grace, and purity. I had procured a musician for the evening, so that my little modest floweret might not bloom unseen in the crowd; and I was rewarded, for I saw many an admiring eye follow the light graceful young figure, and rest on the sweet truthful face of my favourite with evident pleasure. After supper the young people who had fatigued themselves with dancing returned to the front parlour and stood talking in groups about the room. Miss F. reclined languidly in a fauteuil near the piano, which stood invitingly open, talking with her brother-in-law, who had called, on his return from Niagara, to conduct her back to the city, as the summer vacation was over. Annie stood opposite, talking with little Nell Thomson, while my cousin, leaning against a pillar behind them, seemed to be quietly observing all. As I approached them, I heard Miss Featherstonough's companion entreating her to play.

'No,' said she, loudly and haughtily, 'I am fatigued. Ask that person (indicating Annie); she will oblige you; she is a music teacher.'

I glanced at my cousin. He remained perfectly motionless, but I saw the indignant blood mount to his forehead. 'Annie, my dear,' said I, determined that she should not play, and wishing to relieve her from her embarrassing position, 'will you walk with me in the piazza?'

She accepted my offered arm gratefully, and we went into the piazza, where my cou-