

CHAPTER XVIII.

SECOND LOVE.

It was evening—Margaret was standing upon the piazza, leaning against one of its wooden pillars. She had been listening to the gay conversation of Mrs. Carroll, Emily and Esther, who were surrounded by a group of admirers—Mr. Everett conspicuous among the number—but now the conversation had slackened: some of the circle had retired to the piano, to listen to the sweet voice of Esther, as she sung a simple melody; while others had entered a smaller parlor to play checkers, backgammon, cards, and the like games. The windows were open, and the rattling of dice, mingled with gay laughter, fell on Margaret's ear; she, however, did not appear to share the universal gayety. Her fine eyes were filled with a sad light, and her whole attitude was listless and depressed. It was evident that her thoughts were far away. She started suddenly, as if recalled from a reverie, as Mr. McIntyre, who had approached her unobserved, addressed her. "Are you building bright castles in the air, Mrs. Hastings?" he asked, "if so, I am sorry thus rudely to call you back to earth; but no," he continued, "if I misjudge not,

your reverie was far from pleasant; but why should you be sad, in the bloom of health and happiness, surrounded by troops of friends, as you are?"

"True," replied Margaret, "yet how long can all this last? Perhaps I was brooding over some of your misanthropical teachings—realizing that all is 'vanity and vexation of spirit,'—thinking of loved friends now lost to me, and of dear ones who might soon follow," and involuntarily her glance rested on her mourning dress.

"But your heart is not buried with the dead; it was not of your late husband, you thought," returned her companion.

A flood of crimson rushed over Margaret's cheeks, neck and brow, as she exclaimed, "this is too much! You presume too far, Mr. McIntyre, on my friendship."

"Forgive me," he replied, "for my presumption in thus addressing you. It is a habit of mine to give expression to my true thoughts—I have always found it offensive in society, and unable or unwilling to use words to conceal my opinions, I have withdrawn myself from it, until in you, I fancied that I had found a friend, who would be willing to receive my blunt words as they were meant,—kindly—I thank you for the few hours of happiness which you have shed over my desolate life, even if that pleasure can exist now, only in the past, since by my presumption I have forfeited my claims to your regard." He turned abruptly away, but Mrs. Hastings recalled him.

“Let me then tell *you* that truth, which you pride yourself so much upon always speaking—perhaps you may find it as unpalatable as your friends:—You are too impetuous, too ready to take offence where none is intended; very apt to say disagreeable things in a disagreeable way, and then expect poor human nature to receive them, without wincing. There are some home-truths for you,” she said, smiling, “and now, don’t you agree with the rest of humanity, that the whole truth is too much of a good thing?”

“No,” returned Mr. McIntyre, “from *you* I can receive what perhaps, I confess, from others I might resent, and under your guidance, if you would curb such a wayward and impetuous nature, I might become very much changed.”

“I fear that you over estimate my ability to check the faults of others; I find it far easier to discover deficiencies and positive errors in myself and in my friends, than to correct them, in either case.”

“In other words, you would tell me, Mrs. Hastings, that you have not sufficient interest in me, to induce you to undertake such an uninviting task, and that I must be to you only one of your common acquaintances, remembered, if at all, as a singular and rather melancholy man. Yet I have hoped for a higher place than this, in your regard,” he continued, “and though what I am about to say to you may seem abrupt, yet I will say it:—I love you, Margaret, and have sought your affection in return—I know that it would have been more in harmony with the usages of society, if I had allowed a longer time to pass

before telling you of my feelings, but I am not shackled by such fetters.—You know much of my history; left an orphan, and my fondest hopes betrayed by false friends, I have led a lonely life; but now, if your love can be mine, a bright future is in store for me—if not, I can but go on my desolate way as before.”

He paused for a reply, but Margaret made none.—“You do not reply—how am I to interpret your silence?” he asked, after some little time.

Margaret’s eyes were filled with tears, as she raised them slowly to his face, and replied, “I have a long story to tell you; when you have heard it, you may not think of me as you now do.”

“I feel sure that nothing could change my sentiments,” he replied, “but when will you tell me this tale?”

“To-night—let us walk a while, to avoid inquisitive eyes; in the meantime I will tell you all.”

Mrs. Hastings took her companion’s offered arm, and in a low, broken voice, told him the story of her first love, and of her marriage. Mr. McIntyre’s expressive countenance betrayed a variety of emotions, as she went on, but she did not look at him till she had finished, when she said, “now, I have told you all—do you not despise me, as I do myself?”

“No, Margaret,” was the reply, while his eyes were bent upon her with a glance of affection, “your second love is more precious to me, than the first of any other woman. Can you give it to me?”

The hand which he had taken in his, was not with-

drawn, and as she returned his gaze, Mr. McIntyre was satisfied.

They walked on for a few moments in silence when, observing that Margaret had no shawl on, her companion proposed a return to the house; "I must be careful of my newly found treasure," he said, "lest it escape me—even now, I fear that like the fairy gifts, it may vanish in the morning."

"There is no danger of that, it is of quite too substantial a nature," replied Margaret, as she bade her friend good-night, and hastened to her chamber. She had not been long there when Esther entered,—“You here already!” she exclaimed, on seeing her step-mother, “I hope you have not another of your headaches!—How thoughtless in me to spend the whole evening in gayety, while you have been suffering here!”

“Don’t reproach yourself too soon, Esther,” said Margaret, with a smile, “but let me tell you how I have passed my time.”

Esther listened in amazement to Margaret’s recital of her engagement to Mr. McIntyre, then in a low voice said, “But what of Arthur Hammond? Did you tell Mr. McIntyre?”

“Oh, Esther!” exclaimed Margaret, much pained, “could you think that I would wrong another noble man, by not telling him all, or by marrying him when I loved another?”

“Then you have ceased to love Arthur!”

“Thank Heavens, yes!” replied Margaret; “I have not yet told you, though I have several times been on

the point of it; that not long since, I met Arthur again. To my surprise and delight, I found that my feelings were entirely changed towards him. I saw plainly, that if my wild and varying temperament would have annoyed him, that his rigid ideas would have no less tormented me. In fact, that he was as far from being perfect as I myself; and I really felt relieved to think that I was not his wife. I have wanted to tell you this before, but the truth was, Esther, I was a little ashamed, after the strong expressions that I had used about him, to you, to own that the idol had fallen. I believe that every woman has *one* ardent attachment for some one, unlike what she ever feels for another; but I am by no means sure that it is best for her to marry the object of it. Mr. McIntyre, I not only esteem, but love. I think we are suited to each other, and I feel sure that I can make him happy, and anticipate no less happiness myself. This isn’t a very romantic view of the subject,” she added, as Esther stood in silence loosening her abundant hair, “but it is the true one, I think.”

“Perhaps so,” replied Esther, thoughtfully, “at all events, I wish you all possible happiness with the man of your choice.”

A few days after this conversation, as Margaret and Esther were seated in their room, Margaret reading aloud, while Esther sat sewing, and Mrs. Wilton leaning back in a rocking-chair, with her thin hands folded, listened to her daughter’s reading, an accomplishment in which she excelled, a light rap was heard at the door, and Emily Sidney entered.

"I have just received a letter from home," she said, "and Mr. Templeton is coming to-day, to spend a few days here, and then going to take aunt Carroll and me home. To tell the truth, I am glad of it, for I am tired of staying here."

"Who is Mr. Templeton?" asked Mrs. Wilton.

"A friend of father's," replied Emily, slightly blushing.

"And of the daughter also, I suspect," said Mrs. Wilton.

"Certainly.—He has always been a great friend of our family, and I think you will like him. Aunt Carroll thinks him perfect, and you and she agree so well on most points, that I think it probable you will be united in this."

"I'm glad to hear of a new arrival, who promises to be an addition to our party," exclaimed Margaret, "for I am tired of seeing new faces that tell the same story of insipidity, and seeing people whose only object or use in life, seems to be the wearing of handsome silks and jewelry."

"In short," added Esther, "you are tired of the Springs, since one great attraction, Mr. McIntyre, has left them. At least, since his departure, you have suddenly had your eyes very widely opened to the fact, that the people here are very much as they have been ever since we came here, good, but slightly common-place individuals."

"No matter what has cleared my vision," replied Margaret, laughing, "the fact remains the same; and

I propose that we leave here, when Mrs. Carroll and Emily do."

"I am delighted to hear you say so," replied her mother; "I shall be glad to get home again, to have a decent-sized room; and, in fact, to have comforts once more—I will go and write to your father now," she continued, as she entered her room.

The day wore slowly away to Emily; but five o'clock did come at last, bringing with it the stage, and a load of passengers, among whom was Mr. Templeton.

"Really a very fine looking man," said Margaret, in an under tone, to Esther, after both had been introduced; and he had passed on to a seat, by the side of Mrs. Carroll, who seemed determined to monopolize him. "He looks as if he knew something. I wonder what he sees in Emily to fancy. See what a contrast between his fine, intellectual face, and her pleasant, but far from intelligent countenance.

"Oh, there is no accounting for tastes," replied Esther; "and I have always heard that intellectual men prefer a simple-hearted and affectionate woman, like our dear Em, to any one suspected of being blue."

"I know," answered Margaret, "that such men usually prefer a humble worshipper to a woman who, while she honors their excellencies, sees also their deficiencies."

"But do you not think these worshippers, as you call them, better calculated than the other class to make home happy for their husbands?" asked Esther.

"No," replied Margaret; "the quiet, simple home

virtues may please them for a while; but they will soon tire of them, unless accompanied by the power of appreciating their higher nature. Every man wants sympathy in his most engrossing pursuits, and so does every woman. How can they find it, if the thoughts of the one never go beyond the four walls of her dwelling, while the other is of far-reaching and comprehensive mind!"

"I agree with you," returned Esther, "that in such cases, there must be unhappiness, unless there is an abundance of that love that covereth all deficiencies; but happily Emily is not such a being as you describe. She is a true woman—kind, loving, and intelligent; and I wonder that you do not value her as highly as I do."

"Don't ask impossibilities, Ettie; I do like her very well, but I can't see her with your eyes.—There, poor Mr. Templeton has at last escaped from Mrs. Carroll; I doubt not, to his great relief," continued Margaret, and as she spoke, Emily and her lover joined them. He was indeed, as Margaret had said, a fine-looking man, though his strongly-marked features could by no means be called handsome. He was apparently about thirty-five years of age. His voice was deep and clear, and though he said but little, his remarks were always to the point.

"Whatever he says means something," remarked Margaret, "which is more than can be said, with truth, of the generality of people."

It was now the day before the departure of their party from the Springs, and all necessary arrange-

ments had been made. Esther and Emily had made their farewell visits to their favorite haunts, and now sat together for their last chat, at twilight.

"You will be sure to come and make me a long visit, this winter, won't you, Esther?" were the parting words of Emily, and as her friend replied "I will, if I possibly can," she insisted, "'where there's a will, there's a way,' and I shall expect you."

Good-nights were exchanged, and Esther retired to her chamber. Margaret, sitting by the window, was dreaming pleasant day-dreams, she was holding an open letter in her hand, the first she had received from Horace McIntyre.

"How bright the world seems to me!" she said, as Esther knelt by her side, caressing her, "It is so pleasant, I fear that it will not last;—my mother's health so much improved; both of my parents so well pleased with Horace, and his love for me so ardent;—I am happy, indeed!"

"Yes, dear Margaret," replied Esther, "you are indeed blessed; but forget not who is the author of all this, and do not bestow your whole heart on the gifts—look up to the Giver, in Heaven—"

Margaret interrupted Esther with a kiss, and made no reply. It was always thus, when she was reminded of her duty to the Father of all; on this one subject she was unapproachable, and met all of Esther's attempts at such conversations with impenetrable reserve.