

ELSIE'S BIRTHDAY GIFT.

A STORY OF WOMAN'S DEVOTION.

And they also found—which was the only comfort Elsie could have had in her great sorrow—that this year, wherein Mr. Langton had alienated himself from his family and friends, had been one long prayer and preparation for death; and the entries in his diary were of a nature to corroborate their testimony to this effect.

It was fortunate for Elsie that she had so much to do at this crisis. The hundred pounds had dwindled considerably by the time all the little debts that will accumulate, in spite of any care, had been paid, and she found herself with a very small sum in hand. She hoped to increase this by the sale of her furniture, &c.; and then her plan was to establish a school for little children, if possible, and by these means to support herself and sister.

Elsie was young and sanguine, and did not realize the difficulties of the plan she had formed. Her extreme youth was a barrier to any enterprise of this kind, and Cecilia Maberly reminded her of this directly it was mentioned to her.

"But, then, what am I to do?" inquired Elsie, mournfully.

Cecilia shook her head. She did not know what to suggest. It seemed hard to discourage Elsie when she was so brave and willing; but she knew that such a position was beyond, not her talents, but her age; and Cecilia was too sincere a friend not to speak the truth when she was asked. But it seemed as if the difficulty might be solved in another way, after all. Stephen Lane waited until after the funeral, and then he came to plead a second time for that which had already been denied him once.

"I only ask that you will try to like me," he said; "and, for the rest, I am contented to abide your own time. I do verily believe I could make you happy, Elsie; and the poor little one is not strong enough to battle with the world, even in your arms. She shall be to me as my own child if you will only consent to become my wife."

"I should be committing a cruel injustice towards you if I did," answered Elsie, very softly; "for it is only right to tell you that I love some one else."

He turned very pale; but his face was resolute and calm.

"You are very good to tell me this, for I am sure it must have been an effort. I will not trouble you any more; but always remember that, if you are in want of a friend, you may rely upon me, for that nothing earthly will give me so much pleasure as to feel myself of service to you."

So saying, he left the room, without once looking back at the woman he had loved with a love which, if not sensitive and delicate, was, at any rate, honest and true.

A week after this, the little world of Casterton was astonished to hear that Elsie Langton had left early in the morning, taking her sister with her, and had gone no one knew where. Miss Merridew had a good deal to say in the matter, of course; and, not being restrained by any considerations of truth, her narrative supplied all necessary details.

Lawrence, had he been there, would have given it the lie, simply guided by his knowledge of Elsie's character; but the others were tolerably credulous, so true it is that people, who will not believe any good of you, unless it is well authenticated, are quite willing to take an evil report upon trust.

Poor Elsie, so honourable and conscientious, was supposed to have fled before her creditors; and the tale went round glibly from mouth to mouth after Miss Merridew's false tongue had set it a-going. Cecilia knew better, for Elsie had written to her at the last, saying that she was weary of waiting for Fortune to come to her, and was going to seek it boldly. She did not mention where, but she promised to write again "when her fortune was made; and, until then, dear Cecilia," she concluded, "trust me always even as I would trust you."

A little while after this, the furniture of Rose Cottage was sold by auction, and the proceeds of the sale, minus the expenses, were forwarded to Elsie by cheque at one of the London post-offices; although which, Miss Merridew, whose fretful curiosity led her to pry the auctioneer with innumerable questions, failed to discover.

Nothing ever occurred to authenticate the scandal Miss Merridew had set afloat, and so it died away gradually. Rose Cottage had another tenant; and the grass grew high on the graves of Mr. and Mrs. Langton in Casterton Churchyard. Often, may be, poor Elsie, struggling desperately with the world, envied them the blessedness of their repose.

"Have you heard the new contract?" inquired Captain Yates of Lawrence Maberly, as the latter sat with a newspaper in his hand, waiting patiently until his friend should have completed his somewhat elaborate toilet.

Lawrence had been five years away, and a great longing he could not stifle had brought him back. Captain Yates had come home in the same ship, upon sick leave, but the voyage had done wonders for him; and, as he stood in front of the glass, arranging his necktie with due precision, no one could fail to admire his handsome face and manly figure.

Lawrence had landed three or four days; but, somehow, he dreaded to go to Casterton. He knew that Elsie was not there; he knew also how cruelly he had misjudged her, for Cecilia was by this time the happy wife of Stephen Lane, whom she had loved secretly for years, and had won him so entirely to herself by her patient devotion, that he had not only regretted the past, or one hope for the future, which she did not fill.

And so Lawrence lingered on in town dreading to meet the certainty of a loss which he knew must make his whole life desolate.

"Shall we take tickets for the concert to-night?" inquired Captain Yates presently. "Some of the fellows at my club were talking about Stella yesterday, and they say she is a glorious creature. She won't sing at the Opera, it seems, although she has been offered splendid engagements, not only here, but in Paris and Vienna. She slips quietly away directly after her last song is over; and not even a prince of the blood royal would be allowed to hand her to her carriage, if he went on his knees in the mud to solicit the favour."

"You must have been very industrious to have acquired all this information in such a

short time," remarked Lawrence carelessly. "Why, the fellows could talk of nothing else last night. Everything is named after her, they say, from a polka to a man-of-war."

"That is a step from the sublime to the ridiculous," answered Lawrence, with a faint smile. "But is she supposed to be so very handsome, as well as accomplished?"

"I believe so! She's the loveliest woman in town!"

"I suppose she is making a fortune fast,"

"There's no doubt of that; and what's more, she might marry any one she liked. The Duke of Lauderdale was after her all last season, but she wouldn't so much as look at him; and her conduct is so dignified and cold, that it is supposed she must have an attachment somewhere."

"A woman is not obliged to have an attachment because she stands on her dignity, in order to repel the advances of those coxcombs who flutter round the heels of a celebrity, in the same way that a moth flutters round a candle. In such a public position as hers, she has need to be careful; and unless the Duke of Lauderdale is very much altered to what he was five years ago, I should imagine that no woman who respected herself would feel flattered by his attention."

"Most of the girls would be glad to catch him anyhow."

"More shame to them!" replied Lawrence, in his deep, grave voice. "A girl who would sell herself for the sake of such splendid misery, must be without conscience and without shame."

"How many do it?" Captain Yates said.

"Very few have moral courage to resist the temptation of rank and wealth."

"I hope you do our Englishwomen injustice. I think you must, otherwise the Duke of Lauderdale would have been married long ago."

"He is quite an exception to the rule."

"I should be sorry to think so. But here we are at the Hall; will you take the tickets, or shall I?"

"I will," Captain Yates said; and Lawrence waited outside whilst he went in. He looked at the plan of the Hall, and secured good seats just opposite the platform; and then they strolled quietly along Oxford Street, noting everything they passed, as men are wont to do who have been some time absent from their native country. Returning, Captain Yates went into his club; Lawrence repaired to his lodging.

It was strange how, all the rest of the day, Lawrence dwelt upon the coming entertainment—almost as eagerly, in fact, as a school-boy going out for a holiday. He could not account for this feeling in any way, but he was conscious of a certain expectancy that kept him restlessly on the alert. He had been ready and waiting a full hour when Captain Yates called for him in his cab, and they went off together. All the first part of the concert seemed to Lawrence "flat, stale, and unprofitable;" but, very strangely, Elsie was in his thoughts all through; and, therefore, he could not feel weary.

It was only by the clapping of hands, and the passionate approval of the audience, that he knew Stella had appeared, and then his reverie was suddenly broken, and he looked up.

She was certainly very beautiful—that was his first impression; and then he had an odd instinct that he was meant to recognize more in her than this; that standing there so calm, and grand, and pale, a queen in her pride and splendor, she was near to him through some tender memory he could not trace.

At least, he knew that she was like Elsie, but Elsie grown to magnificent womanhood, such as he had never conceived it possible for his little playfellow of olden times to attain. The gracious prettiness of the girl must have been succeeded by the most perfect and extraordinary development, if this were Elsie, who was diffident over her little song in a Casterton drawing room, and yet sang so calmly and sweetly in face of a crowd.

Assuredly it could not be Elsie. He was revolving this question in his own mind, and at each pause in his mental argument he looked up at her fixedly, either for confirmation or denial of some particular clause in his bill of objections. Some magnetic attraction drew her glance towards his, and their eyes met.

He saw her suddenly totter, and turn as pale as death. She looked at him imploringly, without, perhaps, knowing that she did so; and her nervous fingers went to her neck, round which she wore a piece of black velvet, with a tiny locket attached thereto.

He knew this again, anyhow, and remembered how he had given it to her the day he first left home, calling her his little wife, his own Elsie, and bidding her be faithful to him until he came again.

Stella sang no more that night. She was led half fainting from the platform; and by noon the next day it was known all over town that the "previous attachment" had turned up in the shape of a tall stranger with a huge red beard.

Not that Lawrence's beard was red, but it might have looked so in jealous eyes, by lamp-light, as Stella's disdainful hand opened the carriage door for him to enter, and take a seat by her side. The ancient duenna, who accompanied her everywhere, was in her usual post, so that there could be nothing to say on that count; and Stella, scooping forward her radiant face, seemed to cast away her crown behind her, and become once more a woman, tender, loving, and true.

"I will never sing to them again," she said, softly; "never—never! I am weary of it all, and now that little Mary is gone—"

"The poor child is dead, then?"

"She has been in heaven a whole year now," replied Elsie, simply, just as she would have spoken in the days gone by; "and her life was so full of suffering, poor darling, that I was almost glad to feel that she was at ease, and happy. I worked for her at first; lately I have worked because it was difficult to sit still, cross one's own hopes idly, when one's thoughts were such hopeless companions."

"What kept you sorrowful?" he asked, under his breath.

He could see the hot, eager flush that greeted this question.

"I had no one to care for me."

"You never wrote to Cecilia," he said, reproachfully; "and yet she was a friend whom you might have trusted always."

"I know that; but I fancied, somehow, that she would not care for me now."

"Why not?"

She hesitated such a long time, and he was obliged to repeat his question at last.

"Because, you see, my position was so altered; and people like Cecilia, who live out of the world, from choice and necessity both, generally regard notoriety as a sin. I would not have claimed the renewal of her friendship under false pretences, and yet I had such a dread of allowing her to recognize me under the name of Stella, that I have refrained from writing at all."

"May I ask what induced you to adopt this disguise, Elsie? You had nothing to be ashamed of, surely. Yours was an honest calling, and Cecilia would have heard you as much praised under your new name as your old."

Elsie's voice trembled with the joy of such sweet approval, as she replied, softly, "Little Mary first gave me the thought. She was strangely precocious and grave, and she would make me open the windows of our little attic to look at the stars."

"You lived in an attic, then? Oh, Elsie!"

"It was a weary struggle at first, Lawrence; how could it be otherwise? But heaven was so good—so merciful—success came before it was too late; and I had the comfort of knowing that my darling wanted for nothing at the last, and was never injured really, or even knew much of the trials I had gone through."

"I understand you, Elsie. You starved that she might have plenty."

"I never said that."

"But it was like you. You always would sacrifice yourself for others, if you could."

"Nay, but I did very well. And it was better so, Lawrence. My head might have been turned by all the adulation I met later, if it had not been for the sad experiences that preceded it. As it was, I was only thankful, never elated. It was no joy to me to hear a frantic audience shouting my name; but it was a true and most fervent pleasure to receive the rich earnings which were to give little Mary the country home she had longed for so often. Her hand was full of violets when she died, and her last breath passed so softly and calmly through her lips, that it was like the sigh of a weary child sinking to sleep."

Elsie paused a minute, and her voice was broken by agitation. Then she rallied, and tried to speak in a gay tone.

"Poor Mrs. Derwent is tired, and I see she has been dozing this last half-hour. She generally nods all the way home."

"Do you live far out of town?"

"Not now. When little Mary was dead, I came back. It was more convenient; and, besides, I missed her hourly there. I have a house at Notting Hill, where it is quiet; and, as this is the last concert of the season, and I have refused all engagements for the province, shall be quite free again, and—"

"I know what you were going to say, Elsie."

"Well, what?"

"You would go down to Casterton, and put Cecilia's friendship to the proof."

"I have a strong inclination to do so, after what you have told me."

"I must go there to-morrow myself, and you will allow me to tell them that you are coming. My mother will be only too glad to receive you; and I'll answer for it Cecilia shows as much concern as you could require. She has always spoken so affectionately of you in all her letters; and I know there is nothing in your profession, Elsie, so nobly as you have comported yourself, which could alter her feelings toward you. I hope I have said enough now to induce you to come, for it will be a holiday in Casterton when they get you there once more."

"If you could tell how I longed to go—"

The carriage stopped at this minute, and Mrs. Derwent woke up suddenly, and began to rub her eyes, and also her chilly finger-tips, protesting that she was almost frozen to death.

"What train shall you come by to-morrow?" Lawrence said, softly, as he helped Elsie out.

"I see you mean to keep me to the point," replied Elsie, smiling. "Won't you come in?"

"Not to-night."

Mrs. Derwent had passed on in front, and Lawrence stooped his lips to Elsie's hand as it lay quietly in his.

"It has been weary work waiting all these years, longing always for a sight of your face," he sighed; "and the parting was cruel; but we have met at last, and I pray heaven that we may never be separated again!"

In her heart, Elsie echoed his prayer fervently; and, long after he was gone, she seemed to hear his tender, deep voice murmuring those sweet words which gave a new hope to her life.

Cecilia was overjoyed when she found that Elsie was coming amongst them again. Stella's fame had reached even the Casterton world; and they were all eager and restless with excitement when Lawrence taught them to identify her with the bright, gentle girl whom they had known so well in days of yore. Miss Merridew went about whispering scandal, as was her wont, and declaring that she knew all kinds of things for certain, "reliable authority," and all that kind of thing; but she had called "Wolf, wolf!" so often, that people listened to her cry no longer, and her malignant gossip met with the utter contempt it deserved.

Execrated by all, she lived a lonely life enough; and died, as such women deserve to die, neglected and alone. It seemed like a dream, too bright to be true, when Elsie, alighting from the carriage at Cecilia's door, found herself in her friend's arms. Cecilia kissed and scolded, and scolded and kissed, whilst Stephen Lane looked on, shrugging his shoulders, and laughing.

There was a happy little reunion that evening in Cecilia's drawing-room. Dr. and Mrs. Maberly and Lawrence came early, and the honours of the evening were divided between Stella and Cissy, Cecilia's only child, a beautiful little creature of three years old, whom grandpa and grandma evidently did their best to spoil.

Elsie sang to them, and was a thousand times happier in their approval than she had been in the passionate admiration of crowds. But the pleasant hours passed swiftly. Little Cissy had closed her blue eyes in sweet slumber a long while, when Dr. Maberly, glancing at the clock, pretended to be frightened at the lateness of the hour, and hurried the others away.

It had been previously settled that Elsie was to stay the first week with the old people; and, therefore, she found herself presently in the quiet village street, leaning on Lawrence's strong arm, and walking soberly in the wake of the elders. How vividly all

the past came back to her then! As they passed under the great elm, which still threw a broad shadow over the house where her childish days had been passed, she felt oppressed, almost to pain, by the eager tide of reminiscences that swept over her. Once more she was a happy, thoughtless girl, rich in blessings, ignorant of the great world in which she would soon have to bear her part, and faithful even then, as now, to the patient hope which had kept her brave through every trial. When they got into the house, Dr. and Mrs. Maberly went straight upstairs, and when Elsie would have followed, she found Lawrence barring her path. He stooped his eager eyes to her face, and said, softly, under his breath, "Once, when you were standing just where you stand now, I asked you a question, Elsie, and you answered me nay. I have no proper pride, I dare say, for I've a mind to try my luck a second time, and see if I can get a different reply."

He paused, and she hung her head, flushed and tremulous.

"Can't you guess that I am going to ask you to be my wife?"

Her head fell so much lower, that it rested on Lawrence's breast, and, from this shelter, she looked up at him tenderly.

"Dear Lawrence," she murmured, "you know that before, when I forced my lips to say 'No,' my heart was saying 'Yes' all the while."

"My dove, my dear!" he said, holding her against him, with a long, passionate strain. "The Simoon sails on the 5th of next month; will you be ready?"

"Wherever you go, I will go."

"Cheerfully?"

"Thankfully, Lawrence. But you must remember that Stella is not such a poor bride as Elsie would have been."

"I don't want to know anything about that, Elsie."

"Only that it ought not to be necessary for you to go back, under these circumstances."

"Do you think I would let my wife keep me all the while I had strength to work, Elsie? Hold your money, and only give me your dear self; and when the five years are ended that I have still to serve for my pension, we will return home, and enjoy the noon of our life and the sober even-tide in the village where we were both born. After all, we are the wiser for having had to wait for our happiness, Elsie. You were but a child when I first wooed you, and though your love was very precious even then, it is infinitely more precious now. The faith that has endured through these years will endure to the end; and we can trust each other better; our love is fuller, deeper, tenderer; and, looking back, I can say firmly what I never thought to say, that your mother, in dying, had such wisdom as our impatient youth could not understand, when she spared little Mary for a while as 'Elsie's Birthday Gift.'"

[THE END.]

A Curious Search.

An Allahabad paper recently received describes a curious search for treasure believed to be buried in the Alford park in that town. It seems that some years ago before the mutiny the then Prime Minister of the King of Delhi resigned his appointment and brought his family and worldly possessions to Allahabad, where he built a large house and an underground chamber to keep his jewels and treasure. This latter is said to have included a lakh of gold mohurs, of the kind now now valued at 28 rupees each. Shortly before the mutiny he died, and during the disturbance, his family fled, covering up the chamber as best they could. When order was restored a line of barracks was constructed by order of Lord Canning on the site of the village in which the ex-Premier's house was built, and the existence of the underground chamber was forgotten by all except some relatives who, on trying to reach it on one occasion were so stung by hornets whom they had disturbed that it was taken as a sign that it was God's will that the treasure should be reserved for a future generation. In course of time the barracks were also abolished, and the present park laid out. Recently the existence of the treasure was brought to the attention of Captain Hamilton, an old resident of Allahabad, who had helped to prepare the site for the barracks. He obtained as much information as could be got from the existing relatives, and obtained from the collector permission to dig and a police escort. On May 22 about 60 coolies were set to work, and they soon came upon some masonry, but unfortunately a young cobra was unearthed just then, and the men refused to work any more, believing that the treasure was guarded by cobras, and that it was an act of sacrilege to dig for it. The excavations, however, had been recommenced and were in progress when the mail left.

Stay in the Wet.

G. F. Symons, an eminent English meteorologist, in a recent scientific paper on the phenomena of thunderstorms argued that instead of running to the nearest shelter to escape wetting during a shower, people should allow themselves to be drenched with rain, because if thoroughly wet it would be impossible for lightning to kill them. But how about death-colds that might thus be caught, and all that sort of thing? It is true that the average man in a thunderstorm doesn't want to be struck by lightning, but it is also natural for him to escape a wetting if he can do so without exposing himself to electrical danger—[Philadelphia Record.]

Small boy—Pa, what is hypocrisy? Father (speaking from experience)—Hypocrisy, my son, is shaking hands cordially with your neighbor, and then when his back is turned, kicking his dog savagely.

"See here, Mr. Grocer," said a Hartford housewife, "if you are going to bring me any more goods I want them to be the very best." "We keep none but the best," "I presume so; you must sell the worst in order to keep the best."

"Pat, is that true that I hear?" "An' what's that, yer honor?" "That's so, yer honor." "But your first wife has only been dead a week." "Shure she's as dead now as ever she will be, yer honor."

The cleanest and most perfectly-polished, hard wood floors have no water used on them. They are simply rubbed every morning with a large flannel cloth which is occasionally dipped in paraffin-oil. The floor is rubbed with the grain of the wood, not across it. This is better than waxing.

PERSONALS.

Mrs. Humphrey Ward has just been offered \$5000 for a story of 30,000 words.

The writings of Zola, Roccaccio and Rabelais have been suppressed in England.

W. M. Rosetti is in press in London a volume of reminiscences of his brother, Dante Gabriel Rosetti.

An interesting unpublished manuscript by Lincoln will be given to the public in the September Century.

When walking out, the Empress of Russia always carries a large fan, with which to screen her face from those who stare rudely at her.

James Russell Lowell has written a sympathetic introduction to a new and beautiful edition of the "Complete Angler," to be published by Little, Brown & Co., Boston.

The well known essayist, Philip Gilbert Hamerton, has just lost his son, Richard Edward Hamerton, who died very suddenly in Paris, where he held the chair of English literature in the University of France.

Florence Nightingale is now nearly 70 years of age, and although she has been an invalid for a long time, she has never allowed her interest in every good work to droop or wither.

Empress Frederick receives £40,000 a year from the German government. The fortune left to her by the Duchess of Galliera brings her in £12,000 a year, and she has a life interest in the trust estate of her husband. In all she has about £70,000 a year.

Cardinal Newman, who is now in his 89th year, is haunted by a dread of losing his sight. In a recent letter from Germany, where he is now sojourning, he alludes in pathetic terms to this fear. His greatest concern is that he would after such a loss be unable to officiate any longer at the sacrifice of mass, which is now his only consolation, except the recollection of a useful and well-spent life.

Harvard University recently conferred on Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes the degree of A. M. It long ago conferred on him the degree of LL.D. The unprecedented course of conferring the lower degree later was, we understand, due to a suggestion of his own, in consequence of a desire on the part of the faculties to bestow on him every honor. He suggested that his record seemed complete with that exception, and signed his note, "I A. M. yours, etc."

"The Woman's Journal" mentions a young artist of Boston, Miss Caroline King, who was earning a fair income, but was anxious to make enough in addition to enable her to visit Paris in the interest of her art studies. A New York firm made a contract with her for a series of designs representing the various industries of women, and Miss King received an order for three hundred dollars, which would enable her to make the Paris trip; but being informed that they were to be used to decorate cigarette packages, Miss King felt that she could not conscientiously furnish them. She gave up the three hundred-dollar order and with it her European trip.

The Prince of Wales' home farms at Sandringham now extend over 2,000 acres. There is the Hall dairy farm, on which are very fine herds of Jersey and Kerry cattle, and a small flock of Southdowns. The Wolferton and Babington farms have the herd of Short-horns, the breeding flock of Southdowns, and the studs of hackneys and Shire horses. The Appleton Hall farm, which was formerly tenanted by the authoress of "Eighteen Years on the Sandringham Estate," is given over to sheep choice stock, i. e., store cattle and leech. H. R. H. has nearly one hundred hackneys at Wolferton, and about seventy Shire breds, and there will be a biennial sale from these studs, the first of which is to be held next summer. There are ten brood mares in the thoroughbred stud. Sandringham Park contains a very curious herd of wild, white horned cattle, which descend from some animals that were sent to the Prince from Hungary by Count Pasticus.

About Annexation.

There can be little or no doubt about its being a fact that the trend of public opinion in Canada is increasing against anything like annexation to the States. For a while it was different. A great many quite thoughtful people while not particularly desirous of such a result themselves, thought that sooner or later the thing was inevitable, that the greater body would assuredly in the social as in the natural world attract the smaller, and they were therefore reconciling themselves to what they thought could not be avoided and were trying to make the most and the best of it. This feeling has of late been steadily and surely dying out. That which is taking its place is not exactly one of alienation, but it is one of resolute recoil from any nearer or closer connection with the neighboring Republic, than what has been all along. Even the wish for unrestricted reciprocity, or anything like it, has to a large extent disappeared or is fast going. The late all but insufferable insolence and swagger, both of the Yankee Government and people, is working its way among the Canadian people and is making many who used to be rather for advocating Yankee connection ashamed to think they could ever have thought of such a thing. Not much is being said, but a good deal is evidently being done in the way of thinking, and the current conclusion reached is that Canada is neither for sale nor capture; that Canadians are going to paddle their own canoe and that for Canada to put itself in the power of its neighbors by ensuring alliances either in the way of reciprocity or sameness of tariff would be a step as foolish and suicidal as could well be imagined. Our neighbors are never tired of telling Canadians what a poor beggarly country they have and how entirely it is dependent upon the good will and forbearance of the wonderful people to the south. Ah, well! So be it. Let them go their way and Canada will go hers, determined as she is to work out her own destiny, and well pleased with her country and its belongings, whatever others may think or say. The States can no doubt do without Canada, and Canada can pleasantly return the compliment, as she says, with you if possible, but without you if necessary.

Bound to fetch 'em.—Miss New-Comer—Dear me! We want to take the boat for Mayville and we have forgotten our tickets. Miss Skinner—Oh, never mind, we will rush up at the last minute and cry; they will let us through.