

THIS OLD COUNTRY.

Good times or bad times, we're with this country still. With her when we sow the grain, an' when we go to mill. Don't care what's in the future; we'll whistle as we go. For this country, brethren, is the best one that we know! —Atlanta Constitution.

BESS MONTROSS.

Outside in the dark night the pine trees were bending and walling before the sweeping wind. Inside was light and music and the gentle murmur of well-bred voices. Outside, an Alabama forest; inside, the comfortable parlors of a winter hotel.

At a small table were two persons—a man and a woman. While the carolers went on they talked, in a careless, haphazard way, as if the matter under discussion were only of the slightest interest; yet, when the music made pause, they, too, were silent.

An open magazine lay upon the table before them. Some one was playing a waltz in bad time, and under its cover the young man again took up the conversational ball where his companion had dropped it.

"I am sorry you don't like my story, Eugenia," he said. "I rather fancy it is the best thing I have done. If I could only have had space to expand the idea. However—"

"It is just the idea I don't like," replied the girl whom he addressed as Eugenia. "It is too greatly expanded already. As usual, you have finished off every phrase, every sentence, every paragraph with the utmost polish of which your art is capable; and it is capable of a great deal. It is as flawless," she hesitated an instant for the comparison, "as the most perfect pearl. And is as cold."

The young man flushed a little with pleasure at her words of measured praise, but relapsed into his habitual composure as she finished.

"That is what I mean it to be," he answered; "we have had somewhat too much of the human passions in our literature. People are being taught that a purely platonic affection cannot possibly exist between a man and a woman. I think differently."

"And so you would have them marry without loving?" She said this with a suggestive gathering of scorn about her mouth.

"By no means," he interposed; but just then the music stopped again and he toyed with the eyeglasses in his hand. As he was about to resume Eugenia interrupted him.

"Yet you make your hero, Palmer Ainsworth, choose his wife as he would a horse—with a calm consideration of what was best suited to his needs."

By this time the suggestion of scorn had deepened until it indicated positive contempt, and the flashing glances from Eugenia Kingdon's eyes denoted clearly that she, at least, would not be chosen in that manner.

"That is quite right," said her companion, with the stubborn persistence that authors always show in defending their work, whether they are right or wrong; "you see, it led to happiness—for both."

"In your story—yes. In real life it would have been misery and shame and humiliation—to the woman—when she came to know how easily she had given herself up."

"She would never know." He spoke with a quiet emphasis that seemed to invest the conversation with some personal element that it had before lacked. Eugenia took advantage of another lull in the music to avoid an immediate reply.

Some one suggested dancing, and the various groups about the parlor disintegrated and reformed about a common centre to discuss the proposition. Eugenia rose to take part in this, while her companion remained and turned thoughtfully the pages that scintillated with the bright and epigrammatic, but icily cold, outpourings of his pen.

Suddenly a voice interrupted his reveries: "Come, old man, don't sit here mooning. We are all going to the dining room to dance. Let's see if we can't make noise enough to keep out the sound of the wind. It howls to-night as if the witches were abroad."

Aylmers looked up curiously into the bronzed and bearded face above him. "Ah, Featherstone, you are here, are you? Didn't know you could leave the mine and show in society—even the society of the pine woods. And, by the way, since when have you been troubled with fancies about witches?" Featherstone laughed softly.

"Not so long as you have about platonic love, I judge, Gordon. At least, I have not attempted to develop my fancies into a cult. Yes, I've read it. Decidedly clever sketch, but I'm sorry for you if you believe it."

Eugenia had come up and stood listening as the men talked. At the first pause she turned to Aylmers: "Shall you dance, Gordon?" she asked.

"No, you know I don't care for it." "We must do something to break the monotony of this awful place. You won't refuse, I hope," she said, with an appealing glance at Featherstone.

"Only too happy, if Gordon will permit," was the ready but half-sarcastic answer.

"Oh, don't mind me. I shall go out and look for your witches, Hugh."

"And we will discuss your theory of platonic love," replied Featherstone, leading his companion away where the strains of the violin were already calling the dancers.

It was very dark in the pines, now that he was beyond the lights from the hotel, and Aylmers started at finding some one crouching beside his path. Pressing forward, he was able to distinguish the form of a woman. She spoke to him tremulously, as if half fearful of physical violence.

"Don't send me away, str, please," she pleaded; "I don't mean no harm here."

By her voice he could tell she was one of the people of the region; a people who are crude, uncultivated, uneducated, but simple and kindly, yet terrible when roused to passion.

"What are you doing here?" Aylmers asked the question not because he cared in the least, but because it seemed incumbent upon him to make some answer.

"I was waiting—to see him—when he comes out," the woman said, hesitatingly. "I saw him through the window dancing, with his arm around that tall dark, beautiful girl—"

She stopped suddenly, as if afraid she had said too much. There was an ominous note in her voice, as if it was not well for this nameless one that she had seen him with his arm about that other woman.

"You saw him dancing, eh? And with another girl? Then you mean your lover, I suppose? But how can that hurt you? You will have him all to yourself after awhile, won't you?" He spoke half mockingly, and his contemptuous note cackled the woman's ear.

"I don't know why I should tell you," she answered sulkily. "I know you are laughing at me. But I will, for I must tell some one. No—I shan't have him—after awhile, because he don't care for me. But he shan't have that other girl."

"My poor woman," said Aylmers, more gently than was his wont. "I don't know whom you are talking about, but if I did I should caution him to look out for you—especially on a dark night like this. And my advice to you is to go home and to bed."

"You don't know who I mean? Then—"

The woman seized his arm and pointed back toward the hotel, where in the sudden glare of light from an open door two figures were revealed in distinct silhouettes.

Something in the attitude of the two, in the way the man bent toward his companion, and the intentness with which she appeared to listen to his words, stung Aylmers like a whip. He turned to the woman with renewed interest; he began to understand the passion that swayed her and to feel some kinship with her.

"What is he to you?" he asked.

"I know him and he is not like other men. He is kind and gentle—not rough and coarse."

"But you see there is the other woman—the one he is with now." In spite of the hurt to himself he felt a malicious pleasure in adding to the woman's torture.

"What is she to me? That?" Aylmers heard a twig snap quickly in her hands, and shrugged his shoulders at the suggestiveness of the sound.

"Don't be rash, my good woman; it won't pay. And it doesn't matter very much if we don't get just what we want."

"Maybe not; to you."

The man laughed at this ready application of his philosophy.

"Well, I am going in," he said, "and it might spoil your chances if Featherstone saw us here together. Besides, this wind is too doleful."

"Much he'd care," she answered, "and I like the wind. It suits me to-night."

In the parlors an hour later the three drew together again.

"I have had a unique experience, Hugh," said Aylmers. "Out here in the pines I chanced on an admirer of yours, who had come out merely for the pleasure of watching you through the windows."

Featherstone tried to suppress a look of annoyance as he answered: "Bess Montross, I suppose. A poor girl here who seems to have taken a fancy to me. Why, I can't imagine."

Aylmers laughed easily. "It was too dark out yonder to judge of her style of beauty," he said, "but I think a man would have his hands full who would undertake to curb her temper."

Eugenia rose and walked away from them to the end of the parlor where the low windows led out upon the gallery. She paused there a moment and lifted the sash and stepped out into the night. At a little distance beneath the trees she could make out the form of a woman. She stepped down fearlessly upon the carpet of soft pine needles.

"You are Bess Montross," she said.

"Yes," answered the woman, boldly. "Then tell me, and tell me truly, as one honest woman to another, what he is to you."

In the intensity of her feeling Eugenia had seized Bess by the arm and brought their faces close together, so that she had only to whisper her last words. And it was in a whisper that Bess answered:

"He is mine—mine—mine!" "In the sight of God?" "In the sight of God—yes."

Eugenia touched her gently. "My poor girl," she said.

But Bess shrank from her and fled away into the night.

Featherstone was superintendent of the Lenoir mines, where they were digging black diamonds from the bowels of the earth. In the morning this work called him away early, and he left without having seen Eugenia again. At the mine there was some trouble for some days, so Aylmers and Eugenia were left much to themselves for companionship.

There was more restraint between them now than there had been, and Aylmers thought Eugenia looked pale and troubled. As for himself, he was noticeably less self-possessed than usual, and less ready in conversation. Perhaps it was because neither felt bright enough to start new topics that the talk often went back to Aylmers' story.

"Perhaps my criticism was too severe," said Eugenia. "It may be best, after all, not to feel too strongly. One is safe, then, I can see your meaning as far as that."

"Yes, and we can see what the other extreme mean. That poor woman whom I found the other night is very unhappy. It is because she cares for Featherstone too much."

"Don't let us speak of her," interrupted Eugenia. And then in self-contradiction she continued: "But she is not to blame. She has not been educated up to our superior plane. She has not learned that the emotions are out of date."

She spoke with a force, rapidity and

lightness of tone that caused Aylmers to look at her in surprise.

"Sometimes I think I do not understand you, Eugenia," he said, "but yet I want to."

He looked about the room to see if there was any danger that he would be overheard, and then went on in an even, careful tone:

"I want to understand you," he repeated. "I wish that we might understand each other. I care very much for you. If you will trust yourself to me I shall try to keep you happy."

"And safe," she added, as if prompting him to a word he had forgotten.

"Yes, and safe," he repeated, without noticing her manner.

"Which means," she said, adopting his own even monotone, "that you wish me to be your wife."

"Certainly," said Aylmers, "what else could it mean?"

"Very well," she answered, "then I will be Mrs. Gordon Aylmers. I think I shall like the name."

At the approach of spring Aylmers and Eugenia decided to be married before their return to the North. There was a quiet wedding in the hotel, and Featherstone was among the guests. When he congratulated the bride he whispered something in her ear that made her turn pale. But she answered him with careful distinctness:

"You forget that I know Bess Montross."

In the throng that surrounded them as they went to the train Bess Montross crept close to Eugenia.

"I lied to you that night," she said. "I thought I would tell you. But if you had not given him up I would have done with you like—that!" And again she broke a twig sharply in her hands.

When Aylmers and his wife had gone Featherstone mounted his horse and rode gloomily toward the mines. On the road he came upon Bess. She made a gesture as though she would stop him.

"Out of my way!" he cried, with an oath. "You have already done me harm enough. Let me never see your face again."

When he had gone on a little way he drew rein suddenly, turned and rode back to where the woman waited.

"Bess," he said, "how much do you care for me?"

The woman laughed drearily. "Don't you know? I've lied to keep you here; I've sold my soul to the devil to drive her away."

Featherstone looked at her closely. She was not uncomely, albeit ill-dressed and showing the unmistakable marks of toil and poverty.

Hugh reached down and took her hand.

"Come, Bess," he said gently; "let us go to the parson. Perhaps this is best after all. Neither of us is platonic."

A Roadless Empire.

As might be expected, the roads in Southern China are not remarkable for their excellence. In a town the street is seldom wider than from five to fifteen feet. Between great cities there runs what is called a "great road," kept in moderate repair, and sometimes exceeding eight feet in width. Half a day's journey from Amoy lies the "great road" that runs almost straight from Peking to Canton. The peculiarity of it consists in no consecutive thirty yards being of the same description. One part is composed of loose shingle, another is paved; here it mounts on the top of a mudbank, there it descends into a narrow ditch. The farmer plows up the highway to increase the size of his field; or he will take it into his head to construct a pond for irrigation purposes where the road used to be.

South of the Yang-ste-Kiang a wheeled vehicle is out of place. In the north the roads are better, and among a variety of methods of travelling the wheelbarrow plays a great part as a means of locomotion. The labor of propulsion is assisted by hoisting a sail when the wind is favorable, and on ordinary occasions by attaching a mule in front. There is no more ludicrous sight than that of a pompous Chinese gentleman bumping along, his round cheeks quivering like a jelly, while a perspiring coolie pushes the shafts behind, and endeavors to keep the wheelbarrow balanced. The springless one-horse cart, which has to encounter roads of the roughest kind makes no provision for bodily comfort. It is stated on good authority that the servant of a British Ambassador actually got concussion of the brain from lying down when ill in the body of a cart of this kind. The writer had a somewhat similar experience when riding on a mall cart over a corduroy road in British Columbia. Being sleepy he left the spring seat, fixed in front and holding three persons, and lay down behind. It was impossible to stay there long. Bumping over the round tree trunks of considerable diameter, which formed the pavement, the hard wooden cart seemed to rise up and smite every portion of his body. A rougher system of making a road can scarcely be imagined.

Not less remarkable than the wheelbarrow was the method employed in Nepal in the time of Tavernier, the traveller, and prevailing in some out of the way places still, of carrying passengers up and down mountain tracks. The women of the country offer themselves as porters. On their shoulders they wear a strap, to which a large cushion is attached where the traveller seats himself. It takes three women, relieving one another from time to time, to carry a man in this rough district.—London Standard.

What a Nest of Birds Will Eat.

Think of a bird-nest with five young ones in it. Every young bird needs, on the average, fifty caterpillars a day, that makes 250 a day. The young birds are fed by their mother for about thirty days, disposing of about 7,500 caterpillars. Each one of these pests eats its own weight in leaves and blossoms every day. If each of these caterpillars eats but one blossom a day this represents the enormous loss of 225,000 blossoms; and suppose only ten blossoms in each hundred would have ripened into a fruit we would still have 22,500 apples or pears less but for the nest of birds.

He—Young Plugiegh is going to the dogs fast. She—I'm sorry for the dogs.—Detroit Free Press.

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