

## Miss Fortescue the Seamstress, —OR— FORTUNE'S CHANGES.

CONTINUED.

THE all-important Saturday evening at last came. At an early hour an elderly gentleman, having a very genial aspect, called on Alice and introduced himself as Mr. Pryor, chairman, etc., etc. After the first salutations were over, Alice expressed her deep obligations to the committee for their very flattering and unexpected offer. Finding that her caller was disposed to be sociable and chatty, she jestingly remarked:

"In offering me this engagement, Mr. Pryor, it would seem that the gentlemen of the committee have been a little venturesome, for they take me entirely on trust."

"In part, Miss Fortescue, but not entirely," said the gentleman, with a good-humored smile.

"Surely no one, with the exception of my mother," rejoined Alice, "has heard me sing since I have resided here."

"Pardon me," replied Mr. Pryor, "I think you labor under a slight mistake!"

"I am positive, sir," said Alice, "that I have not sung a note out of this room, and only in the presence of my mother."

"I will admit all that," smilingly remarked Mr. Pryor, "but not that your mother has been at all times your sole auditor. Let me explain," he added, seeing the wondering expression on Alice's face:

"Last Tuesday evening, I think it was, a young gentleman belonging to our committee, by the merest accident happened to extend his walk in this direction. As he arrived opposite your house, his steps were arrested, to use his own language, 'by one of the sweetest voices he ever heard.' He waited on the walk until the lady had finished her singing. He made inquiries in regard to said lady, ascertained her name, and by his urgent recommendation the committee was induced to invite her to sing in the choir."

"That, then, solves the mystery which has puzzled mother and myself not a little," said Alice, a modest blush mantling her cheeks. "We wondered why the invitation was extended to one of whose musical abilities the committee must be, as we supposed, in total ignorance."

"I acknowledged just now," remarked Mr. Pryor, "that we selected you partly on trust, but not entirely. We have relied solely on the representations of the young gentleman who listened to your performance; I have no doubt that when the rest of the committee hear you this evening, they will be quite as favorably impressed as was our young friend."

As Alice began to make preparations for her departure, Mr. Pryor said:

"By the by, Miss Fortescue, would you object to sing this evening the piece which so charmed my friend the other evening?"

"It was an 'Ave Maria' by Schumann," said Alice, going to the music-stand and selecting the composition; "I will sing it with pleasure."

In a short time they started to attend the rehearsal. On the way to the church her companion remarked that he had invited a number of friends, which he hoped would not be objectionable to her.

"Not in the least," was her reply; "but you must remember, Mr. Pryor, that this will be my debut, therefore any short comings that may arise from the embarrassment of the occasion I trust will be overlooked."

The gentleman assured her that everything would be taken into consideration, while his mental conclusion was, as he gazed into the brave face turned to him, that there was but very little danger of her failing to meet all requirements.

On being introduced to the choir, Alice received a very cordial greeting from its members, among whom she very soon felt herself quite at home. She was taken a little by surprise at the large number of ladies and gentlemen present in the body of the church. She felt that it was not before an ordinary audience that she was to appear, but an assembly of critics. It was a trying situation for the young singer. Had she been constitutionally timid, the fact we have mentioned would very naturally have caused her to appear to disadvantage. But she was fortunately blessed with a good share of confidence, and she awaited the ordeal with less perturbation than she had feared she should experience.

There was a slight tremulousness perceptible in Alice's voice at the commencement of the first piece sang by the choir; not sufficient to mar the tones, nor marked enough to attract particular notice. Instead of telling against her, it seemed rather to enlist the sympathies of the audience in her behalf. It soon passed off, however, and her voice swelled out to its full compass, clear and defined, yet blending harmoniously with the other parts. It was very evident, by the expressive nodding of heads and whispered remarks of the occupants of the pews, that the impression she made was decidedly favorable. In the two or three pieces that followed, that impression was evidently greatly strengthened. In the last piece, in particular, where she had a short solo, a murmur of approbation from the pews below greeted her execution of it.

But now came what Alice considered,

and what in fact was, the severest ordeal to which the young debutante had been or would be subjected, the singing of the "Ave."

A rustling movement among her auditors and the air of expectancy they wore, as Alice arose in the choir, evinced that their interest was concentrated on this particular performance.

"You have brought an extra copy with you, I presume, Miss Fortescue?" said the organist, as he arranged the notes before him on the instrument.

"No, I have but that one," replied Alice; "but it matters not, as I am perfectly familiar with the piece."

"You will not attempt it without the notes!" said the former, with some little astonishment.

"I have no other alternative," rejoined Alice, with a smile, "unless I look over your shoulder, which would be somewhat awkward."

The old gentleman said no more, but with a doubtful shake of his head turned to his instrument and commenced the performance.

Whatever nervousness troubled Alice on her first essay that evening, she experienced none now. She was one of those who, let the emergency be what it may, seemed endowed with power to meet every demand that may be made upon them. Encouraged by the success that she had already attained—for all singers and public speakers are quick to discern whether or not they have secured the sympathies of their hearers—she entered upon her task with the fullest confidence.

The moment her pure, sweet, magnetic tones were heard there was an instantaneous hush throughout the church, as if a sudden spell had been wrought upon the audience. As she proceeded and entered more fully into the subject she was rendering, she seemed to lose all consciousness of her surroundings, and poured forth her petition with a passionate fervor, which manifested to all that she was not rehearsing a part, but that her utterances sprang from the impulses of her own exalted spirit. She made the prayer her own, and the effect it produced upon the listener, were not a triumph of art, but of nature.

As her voice arose, now in impassioned adoration, now in fervent supplication, and again breathed low in penitential confession, a glance at the audience, sitting motionless, almost breathless, was sufficient to show that she held her listeners in complete thrall.

The final "amen" fell from her lips, and still the same profound hush was observed, until, flushed with emotion, Alice turned to resume her seat, when the combined plaudits of the choir, followed simultaneously by those in the pews below, broke the stillness.

The aged organist left his instrument, and taking the hand of the blushing girl, said, in a voice full of feeling:

"Heaven bless you, my child! We now know how the angels sing!"

In a short time the committee in a body entered the choir, and were introduced to Alice by the chairman, each of whom congratulated her on her success, and bestowed the most flattering encomiums on her performances.

On introducing the several members of the committee, the chairman, Mr. Pryor, remarked, as he presented one gentleman:

"This is Mr. Frederick Stanley, Miss Fortescue, the gentleman I spoke of when I called on you, who, by the chance of hearing you sing the other evening, has secured such a valuable addition to our choir."

As Alice gracefully exchanged the usual courtesies, she was mentally querying, "Where have I met him before?" It was not until she had retired for the night that it came to her mind, that it was at Miss Dunbar's, on an occasion already known to the reader.

Before leaving the choir, Mr. Pryor apologized to Alice, saying that he should be detained by parish business, but that Mr. Stanley had kindly volunteered to attend her home; he hoped the arrangement would be satisfactory to her. Of course Alice was more than satisfied to exchange her elderly beau for one a score of years younger, although she did not so express herself to the worthy chairman. As Mr. Pryor did not remain at the church, but proceeded directly to his own domicile, it looked very much as if there had been a collusion between the two members of the committee.

Alice was very much pleased with her escort. He was an ardent lover of music, and they found plenty to talk about in discussing their favorite subject. On taking leave of her, Mr. Stanley said that the decision of the committee in regard to engaging her would be early communicated to her. This remark caused Alice not a little wonderment. She supposed that her engagement was already settled. She knew that she had put in a proviso on accepting the invitation of the committee, but from the commendations bestowed upon her, she had every reason to believe that she had given entire satisfaction. She had no fears in regard to the decision, although she awaited the promised communication with a considerable degree of curiosity.

She was not left long in suspense. Early the following morning the postman brought

her a letter. The reader, perhaps, can in some degree enter into the feelings of Alice as she read its contents, which ran as follows:

"MISS ALICE FORTESCUE.—The music committee of G—Street Church have unanimously decided to engage your services as soprano, and that, on condition of your filling the situation for three years, your salary shall be \$900 per annum payable quarterly.

"Very respectfully,  
"DAVID PRYOR, Chairman, etc."

"Whom do you suppose they have engaged as soprano in our choir?" asked Miss Gates of her friend Miss Dunbar, as they met the next day on their way from the morning service.

"Really, I cannot imagine; who is it pray?" responded Miss Dunbar.

"Why, none other than Miss Fortescue—the idea!" replied Miss Gates. "I am told that they give her an extravagant salary. I suppose she will put on more airs than ever now!"

"What kind of a singer is she—has she a good voice?" inquired her friend.

"O, she has a passable one, I suppose, although the gentlemen appear to be in raptures with it, and her, too, I should judge. By the by, Mr. Stanley was at church this morning, a new thing for him, and he seemed more taken with her than any. And, would you believe, it, Miss Dunbar, I saw him go up and shake hands with her as she came out of church—the idea!—and afterwards accompany her down the street?"

"As he is one of the music committee, he had probably something to say to her in relation to the singing."

"Of course, it is not to be supposed that otherwise he would take notice of one of her class. And yet they appeared to be mighty 'thick,' I assure you. When I passed them he was so engrossed with her that he did not condescend even to notice me—the idea!" And the lady plied her fan vigorously, as if to soothe her ruffled dignity.

"Do you attend vespers this evening?" asked Miss Dunbar. "I would like to accompany you, and hear what kind of a voice the girl has."

"O yes, I always attend when the weather permits. I will call for you on my way. Doubtless I shall find Mr. Stanley with you, as usual, who will act as our escort."

"Very likely," said Miss Dunbar, very confidently; "be sure and come early, Miss Gates." And the two friends passed on their respective ways.

At an early hour after tea Miss Gates called on her friend. To the surprise of the former, and something more than surprise of the latter, Mr. Stanley had not made his appearance. They awaited his coming until the very last moment before proceeding to the church.

"He is probably unavoidably detained," said Miss Dunbar, not altogether easy in her mind. "I will leave word for him to come after us." The notice was left, and the ladies took their departure.

Although the relations that existed between Mr. Stanley and Miss Dunbar were very intimate, there was no "engagement," neither had there been a "declaration." It was very manifest, however, that it needed but a proposal on the part of the gentlemen to bring the first named affair about. It had all along been decided by those uninterested that, sooner or later, such would be the result of the matter.

Miss Dunbar was deemed a very "eligible match," for Mr. Stanley, who belonged to an old aristocratic family, and was the inheritor of great wealth. She possessed many personal attractions, and by some was called very beautiful. So far as form, features and complexion were concerned, this judgment could not be disputed. She was, withal, refined and ladylike in her manners, and highly accomplished, and above all, in the estimation of many, she was the prospective heiress of a vast fortune.

She had at an early age attracted the attention of Frederick Stanley—had won, indeed, his "calf-love," as the budding affections of boyhood are styled. This youthful fancy would doubtless have ripened into a deep abiding sentiment, had it not been for the fact that as he grew older, and the "glamour" of a first love was gradually dissipated, he began to discover that the object of his devotion was not the all-perfect being he had fancied her. The moment one begins to discover faults in the object of one's worship, that moment the idol commences to crumble and fall.

Stanley's character was above the ordinary standard. His mind was more comprehensive and far-reaching than is usual with young men. Although thoroughly genial in his nature, he was less given to frivolities of life than others of his age, and especially those who, like himself, possessed abundant means to gratify every wish. He belonged to what some styled aristocracy, but it was of the highest type, having not the least taint of the mushroom to it. He was remarkably free from assumption on account of birth, position or property; and nothing was more distasteful to him than the pretension of those who plumed themselves on such distinctions.

The first suspicion awakened in the mind of Stanley that his worshipped idol might be after all, nothing but clay, was caused by the discovery in her of those pretensions

to which we have just alluded. He thereupon endeavored to obtain a clearer insight into the lady's character. It was in the pursuance of this subject that he introduced the discussion recorded in our first chapter. He was not altogether pleased with the result of his experiment, leaving, as he did, the lady in a most unfavorable light. The mushroom taint was too obvious to escape his notice, and his estimation of the lady was in consequence greatly lowered. He began to wonder at the infatuation which had exalted her above all others of her sex; and when a young man begins to indulge in such reflections on the object of his passions, be sure the progress of disenchantment is in rapid progress.

We left our ladies on the way to church, where they arrived just as the services commenced. Before they were fairly settled in their seats, an unpleasant nudge from Miss Gates, and the whispered remark, "I declare if there is not Mr. Stanley in his pew—the idea!" brought a slight flush to her companion's cheek. Whether the nudge or the discovery had the most to do with the heightened color, Miss Dunbar alone could say.

We are sorely afraid that the lady in question was in any but a devotional frame of mind during the exercises of the evening, for she could not but observe how completely absorbed the gentleman appeared during each performance of the new singer. This, however, should not have caused the lady uneasiness, for nearly the entire congregation evinced the same rapt attention as her liquid sympathetic notes were heard in the beautiful vesper service.

Sitting where he commanded a view of the choir, Frederick Stanley might well be pardoned the steadfast admiring glances bestowed upon the fair singer. Very beautiful was Alice at all times, but when in the act of singing, a divine beauty rested upon her countenance. Many vocalists nearly destroy the effect of their music, if seen, by their facial contortions while singing. It was not so with Alice. During her performances each feature was moulded in perfect grace, while her face was illuminated with an almost angelic beauty. Couple with this her matchless voice and execution, and what marvel was it that Frederick Stanley, keenly susceptible of the beautiful, and a passionate lover of music, should be so "carried away with her," as Miss Gates would express it?

At the close of the services a passing shower caused the ladies to huddle in the vestibule of the church, with dismal anticipation of ruined bonnets and dresses. By good luck Stanley found a stray umbrella in his pew. Securing the prize he hastened to the crowded porch. Miss Dunbar and her friend saw him making his way in their direction, and, confident that the umbrella was intended for them, they began to gather up their skirts to protect them from the wet. To their great disappointment he passed within a short distance of them without a sign of recognition, and they had the mortification of seeing him go towards Alice, who at that moment descended from the choir, and of hearing him say:

"It is raining, Miss Fortescue; will you not accept the protection of my umbrella?"

The reader will imagine the feelings of Miss Dunbar, as she watched the couple thread their way through the crowd and at last disappear from the doorway. As for Miss Gates, in her indignant astonishment she could only utter, which she did most emphatically:

"The idea!"

The reflections of Miss Dunbar on arriving home that night, were, as may be supposed, far from agreeable. The feelings which agitated her were not those of wounded love; nor was it, in the strictest sense, jealousy that rankled in her bosom; it was simply mortification, with no small admixture of anger.

Her pride was touched—probed to the quick. She felt that she had been subject to a double slight. In neglecting to make his usual evening call, and going to church in stead, for what purpose he best knew, was Mr. Stanley's first slight. But the leaving her in the church, to find her way home through the rain as best she could, and "going off with the sewing-girl"—this was the crowning offence which awoke her righteous indignation.

We have said she had no feelings of wounded love. Miss Dunbar was a woman incapable of strong affection. She was by nature cold and unimpassioned. Although she had spared no effort to secure the regards of Stanley, it was not love that prompted her. In looking forward to the time when she should become his wife—and she doubted not that day would surely come—she cherished no fond anticipations of the event—the thought of it never caused a single passionate thrill. Her predominant thought in regard to her becoming Stanley's wife was, that her marriage would be the means of her attaining a somewhat higher rank in the social scale. Ambition, not affection, was her ruling motive.

The reception Stanley met with when next he called on Miss Dunbar was not a flattering one. The lady was not particularly demonstrative at any time in manifesting her regard; but on this occasion her manner was so studiously cold and constrained that the most indifferent ob-

server could not fail to observe it, and it rather amused him. He sought for no explanation. He knew very well where the shoe pinched, and he did not seem disposed to relieve the pressure. He would not at present, perhaps, have sought an opportunity to break up the intimate relations that existed between them, although they had begun to grow irksome to him, but as one was offered him, he was very willing to avail himself of it. Nothing had ever passed between them—there had been no interchange of sentiment—therefore if either saw fit to interrupt the existing intimacy there was no necessity for explanations.

Stanley made his visit as brief as he possibly could, consistently with due courtesy; nor was he in much haste to repeat it. Thereafter they met but seldom, but when they did meet, it was with the usual show of friendship, although, on the part of Stanley, it was with the consciousness that the spell which once enthralled him was broken, and on the part of Miss Dunbar, that her power over him had passed away.

"Mother dear, do you hear?" said Alice one morning in a playful, positive way she sometimes affected; "after these shirts are finished no more work in this house—not another stitch!"

"I don't know, my child—"

"But I know," interrupted the lively girl; "with the salary I now receive we can afford ourselves a little relaxation; besides, you know, we ought to give other poor folks a chance! Now do not say one word against it, or away go thread, needle and thimble out of the window!"

"Ah, my dear child," said the mother, smiling at her daughter's sportive manner, "it is all very well now; so long as you have your health and retain your voice, we have sufficient for our limited wants—but what if they fail?"

"They are not going to fail, mother dear! I am in perfect health—why should I be sick? Nine-tenths of the sickness in the world is caused by wicked carelessness. People fall sick and say it is a providential infliction, when Providence has no more to do with it than my little finger. It is, as I have said, their own wicked carelessness, their disregard of the well-known laws of nature, that has brought the evil upon them; and if death is the result, I do not see why they are not as open to the charge of suicide as if they had taken poison, sent a bullet through their brains, or strangled themselves with a rope. The end is the same, and the only difference is, the latter adopt the most speedy process to obtain it."

"Why, my dear child, how do you do talk!" said Mrs. Fortescue, a little shocked at the views advanced by Alice.

"It is the truth, mother, and a very sad truth," said Alice. "But let it pass. As for my health, you shall see what a prudent body I will be, and what care I take of myself. As for the voice, it is a rare thing for a woman to lose that; if it were less rare, some people—husbands, for instance—would deem it a blessing rather than a misfortune!"

"But the little work I do," said the mother, returning to the subject of giving up sewing, "I consider it a pastime rather than a toil."

"If you want a pastime, mother, there are your dresses that need renovating and replenishing. You have hardly one decent to wear. But in proposing to relinquish needlework, I do not intend to remain idle."

"What new project have you got into your head, my child?"

"Not a new one, but an old one revised," Alice rejoined. "Miss Vaughan, I learn, is about to give up her classes in music, being on the eve of marriage. Our organist who takes quite a fatherly interest in me, has suggested that I can secure her pupils, and kindly offered his services to bring the matter about. I am expecting to hear from him on the subject in the course of to-day or to-morrow."

That afternoon Alice received the gratifying information that nearly all Miss V.'s pupils would attend her class, and that a number of others expressed a wish to join it.

Soon after taking her music class, she was one day honored with a call from Miss Gates. The lady came to urge her to perform some sewing at her own house. As Alice politely declined, the lady said in a tone and with an air of dissatisfaction:

"Well, I suppose it must be done here, then; when will you do it?"

"Excuse me, Miss Gates," said Alice, "I should be very happy to oblige you, and I thank you for calling on us, but mother and I have given up taking in needlework."

"O!" ejaculated Miss Gates.

This was all the lady said; but the tone in which that simple interjection was uttered, and the manner of the speaker, gave it a deal of significance. As plainly as tone and air can express language, hers implied, "Yes, got above it, I suppose!" And when she took her leave, in every line of her face was legibly written:

"The idea!"

It was remarkable about this time what efficiency young Stanley displayed in the performance of his duties as music-committee. Heretofore, he had discharged them in a formal sort of way; but since the advent of the new singer he was a very constant attendant at the rehearsals, often bringing some new piece of music to be sung, in which the soprano had a prominent part. Concluded next week.