

First Love;
Or, Constancy in the Nineteenth Century
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FIRST LOVE ; OR, CONSTANCY IN THE NINETEENTH
CENTURY.

THE assertion that "What is everybody's business is nobody's," is true enough ; but the assertion that "What is nobody's business is everybody's," is still truer. Now, a love affair, for example, is, of all others, a thing apart—an enchanted dream, where "common griefs and cares come not." It is like a matrimonial quarrel—never to be benefited by the interference of others : it is a sweet and subtle language, "that none understand but the speakers ;" and yet this fine and delicate spirit is most especially the object of public curiosity. It is often supposed before it exists : it is taken for granted, commented upon, continued and ended, without the consent of the parties themselves ; though a casual observer might suppose that they were the most interested in the business.

All love affairs excite the greatest possible attention ; but never was so much attention bestowed as in the little town of Allerton, upon that progressing between Mr. Edward Rainsforth and Miss Emily Worthington. They had been a charming couple from their birth—were called the little lovers from their cradle ; and even when Edward was sent to school, his letter home once a quarter always contained his love to his little wife. Their course of true love seemed likely to run terribly smooth, their fathers having maintained a friendship as regular as their accounts. Mr. Worthington's death, however, when Emily was just sixteen, led to the discovery that his affairs were on the verge of bankruptcy. Mr. Rainsforth now proved himself a true friend ; he said little, but did everything. Out of his own pocket he secured a small annuity to the orphan girl, placed her in a respectable family, and asked her to dine every Sunday. With his full sanction, "the little" became "the young lovers ;" and the town of Allerton, for the first time in its life, had not a fault to find with the conduct of one of its own inhabitants.

The two old friends were not destined to be long parted, and a few months saw Mr. Rainsforth carried to the same churchyard whither he had so recently followed the companion of his boyhood. A year passed away, and Edward announced his intention of (pray let us use the phrase appropriated to such occasions) becoming a votary of the saffron god. The whole town was touched by his constancy, and felt itself elevated into poetry by being the scene of such disinterested affection. But, for the first time in his life, Edward found there was another will to be consulted than his own. His trustees would not hear of his marrying till he was two-and-twenty, the time that his father's will appointed for his coming of age. The rage and despair of the lover were only to be equalled by the rage and despair of the whole town of Allerton. Every body said that it was the cruellest thing in the world ; and some went so far as to prophesy that Emily Worthington would die of a consumption before the time came of her lover's majority. The trustees were declared to have no feeling, and the young people were universally pitied. The trustees would not abate one atom of their brief authority ; they

had said that their ward ought to see a little of the world, and they were both of them men of their word.

Accordingly, it was settled that Edward should go to London for the next three months, and see how he liked studying the law. He certainly did not like the prospect at all; and his only consolation was, that he should not leave his adored Emily exposed to the dissipations of Allerton. She had agreed to go and stay with an aunt, some forty miles distant, where there was not even a young curate in the neighbourhood. The town of Allerton was touched to the heart by the whole proceeding; no one spoke of them but as that romantic and that devoted young couple. I own that I have known greater misfortunes in life than that a young gentleman and lady of twenty should have to wait a twelve-month before they were married; but every person considers their own the worst that ever happened, and Edward and Emily were miserable to their hearts' content. They exchanged locks of hair; and Emily gave him a portfolio, embroidered by herself, to hold the letters that she was to write. He saw her off first, under the care of an old servant, to the village where she was to stay. She waved her white handkerchief from the window as long as she could see her lover, and a little longer, and then sank back in a flood of "falling pearl, which men call tears."

Edward was as wretched, and he was also exceedingly uncomfortable, which helps wretchedness on very much. It was a thorough wet day—all his things were packed up—for he himself was to start in the afternoon when the mail passed through—and never was young gentleman more utterly at a loss what to do with himself. In such a case an affair of the heart is a great resource; and young Rainsforth got upon the coach-box looking quite unhappy enough to satisfy the people of Allerton. It must be owned that he and the weather equally brightened up in the course of a couple of stages. To be sure, a cigar has a gift of placidity peculiarly its own. If I were a woman I should insist upon my lover's smoking: if not of much consequence before, it will be an invaluable qualification after, the happiest day of one's life.

In these days roads have no adventurers—they might exclaim, with the knife-grinder, "Story! Lord bless you, I have none to tell!"—we will therefore take our hero after he was four days in London. He is happy in a lover's good conscience, for that very morning he had written a long letter to his beloved Emily—the three first days having been "like a tectotum all in a twirl," he had been forced to neglect that duty so sweet and so indispensable to an absent lover. He had, however, found time to become quite domesticated in Mr. Alford's family. Mr. Alford was of the first eminence in his profession, and had two or three other young men under his charge; but it was soon evident that Edward was a first-rate favourite with the mother and two daughters at all events. They were fine-looking girls, and who understood how to look their best. They were well dressed, and it is wonderful how much the hair "done to a turn," ribands which make a complexion, and an exquisite *chaussure*, set off a young woman. Laura taught him to waltz, and Julia began to sing duets with him. Now, these are dangerous employments for a youth of one-and-twenty. The heart turns round, as well as the head sometimes, in a *sauteuse*, and then it is difficult to ask these tender questions appropriated to duets, such as "Tell me, my heart, why wildly beating?" "Canst thou teach me to forget?" &c., without some emotion.

A week passed by, and the general postman's knock, bringing with it letters from his trustee, who, as an item in his accounts, mentioned that he had just heard that Miss Emily Worthington was quite well, put him in mind that he had not heard from her himself. Oh! how ill-used he felt; he had some thoughts of writing to overwhelm her with reproaches for her neglect; but, on second thoughts, he resolved to treat her with silent disdain. To be sure, such a method of showing his contempt took less time and trouble than writing four pages to express it would have done. That evening he was a little out of spirits, but Julia showed so much gentle sympathy with his sadness, and Laura rallied him so pleasantly upon it, that they pursued the subject long after there was any occasion for it. The week became weeks—there was not a drawback to the enjoyment of the trio, excepting now and then "some old friends of papa, to whom we must be civil; not," said Laura, "but that I would put up with one and all, excepting that odious Sir John Belmore."

Edward had been in town two months and a fortnight, when one evening Julia—they had been singing "Meet me by moonlight alone"—asked him to breakfast with them. "I have," said she, "some commissions, and papa will trust me with you. He breakfasted, and attended the blue-eyed Julia to Swan and Edgar's. "Now I have some conscience!" exclaimed she, with one of her own sweet languid smiles. Julia had an especially charming smile—it so flattered the person to whom it was addressed. It was that sort of smile which it is impossible to help taking as a personal compliment. "I have a little world of shopping to do—bargains to buy—netting silks to choose; and you will never have patience to wait. Leave me here for an hour, and then come back—now be punctual. Let me look at your watch—ah! it is just eleven. Good bye, I shall expect you exactly at twelve."

She turned into the shop with a most becoming blush, so pretty, that Edward had half a mind to have followed her in, and quoted Moore's lines—

"Oh! let me only breathe the air,
The blessed air that's breathed by thee;"

but a man has a natural antipathy to shopping, and even the attraction of a blush, and a blush especially of that attractive sort, one on your own account—even that was lost in the formidable array of ribands, silks, and bargains—

"Bought because they may be wanted,
Wanted because they may be had."

Accordingly, he lounged into his club, and the hour was almost gone before he arrived at Swan and Edgar's. Julia told him she had waited, and he thought—What a sweet temper she must have not to show the least symptom of dissatisfaction! on the contrary, her blue eyes were even softer than usual. By the time they arrived at her father's door he had also arrived at the agreeable conclusion, that he could do no wrong. They parted hastily, for he had a tiresome business appointment; however, they were to meet in the evening, and a thousand little tender things which he intended to say occupied him till the end of his walk.

When the evening came, and after a toilette of that particular attention which in nine cases out of ten one finds leisure to bestow on oneself,

he arrived at Mr. Alford's house. The first object that caught his attention was Laura looking, as the Americans say, "dreadful beautiful." She had on a pink dress direct from Paris, that flung around its own atmosphere *de rose*, and nothing could be more finished than her whole *ensemble*. Not that Edward noted the exquisite perfection of all the feminine and Parisian items which completed her attire, but he was struck by the general effect. He soon found himself, he scarcely knew how, quite devoted to her; and his vanity was flattered, for she was the belle of the evening.

It is amazing how much our admiration takes its tone from the admiration of others; and when to that is added an obvious admiration of ourselves, the charm is irresistible. "Be sure," said Laura, in that low, confidential whisper, which implies that only to one could it be addressed, "if you see me bored by that weariful Sir John Belmore, to come and make me waltz. Really, papa's old friends make me quite undutiful!" There was a smile accompanying the words which seemed to say, that it was not only to avoid Sir John that she desired to dance with himself.

The evening went off most brilliantly; and Edward went home with the full intention of throwing himself at the fascinating Laura's feet the following morning; and, what is much more, he got up with the same resolution. He hurried to Harley-street, and—how propitious the fates are sometimes!—found the *dame de ses pensées* alone. An offer is certainly a desperate act. The cavalier—

"Longs to speak, and yet shrinks back,
As from a stream in winter, though the chill
Be but a moment."

Edward certainly felt as little fear as a gentleman well could do, under the circumstances. He, therefore, lost no time in telling Miss Alford, that his happiness was in her hands. She received the intelligence with a very pretty look of surprise.

"Really," exclaimed she, "I never thought of you but as a friend; and last night I accepted Sir John Belmore! As that is his cabriolet, I must go down to the library to receive him; we should be so interrupted here with morning visitors!"

She disappeared, and at that moment Edward heard Julia's voice singing on the stairs. It was the last duet that they had sang together.

"Who shall school the heart's affection?
Who shall banish its regret?
If you blame my deep dejection,
Teach, oh, teach me to forget!"

She entered, looking very pretty, but pale. "Ah," thought Edward, "she is vexed that I allowed myself to be so engrossed by her sister last night."

"So you are alone," exclaimed she. "I have such a piece of news to tell you! Laura is going to be married to Sir John Belmore. How can she marry a man she positively despises?"

"It is very heartless," replied Edward, with great emphasis.

"Nay," replied Julia, "but Laura could not live without gaiety. Moreover, she is ambitious. I cannot pretend to judge for her; we never had a taste in common."

"You," said Edward, "would not have so thrown yourself away!"

"Ah! no," answered she, looking down, "the heart is my world."

And Edward thought he had never seen anything so lovely as the deep blue eyes that now looked up full of tears.

“ Ah, too convincing, dangerously dear,
In woman's eye, th' unanswerable tear.”

Whither Edward might have floated on the tears of the “dove-eyed Julia” must remain a question; for at that moment—a most unusual occurrence in a morning—Mr. Alford came into his own drawing-room.

“So, Madam,” he exclaimed in a voice almost inarticulate from anger, “I know it all. You were married to Captain Dacre yesterday; and you, Sir,” turning to Edward, “made yourself a party to the shameful deception.”

“No,” interrupted Julia; “Mr. Rainsforth believed me to be in Swan and Edgar's shop the whole time. The fact was, I only passed through it.”

Edward stood aghast. So the lady, instead of silks and ribands, was buying, perhaps, the dearest bargain of her life. A few moments convinced him that he was *de trop*; and he left the father storming, and the daughter in hysterics.

On his arrival at his lodgings, he found a letter from his guardians, in which he found the following entered among other items:—“Miss Emily Worthington has been ill, but is now recovering.” Edward cared, at this moment, very little about the health or sickness of any woman in the world. Indeed, he rather thought Emily's illness was a judgment upon her. If she had answered his letter, he would have been saved all his recent mortification. He decided on abjuring the flattering and fickle sex for ever, and turned to his desk to look over some accounts to which he was referred by his guardians. While tossing the papers about, half-listless, half-fretful, what should catch his eye but a letter with the seal not broken! He started from his seat in consternation. Why, it was his own epistle to Miss Worthington! No wonder that she had not written; she did not even know his address. All the horrors of his conduct now stared him full in the face. Poor, dear, deserted Emily, what must her feelings have been!—He could not bear to think of them. He snatched up a pen, wrote to his guardians, declaring that the illness of his beloved Emily would, if they did not yield, induce him to take any measure, however desperate; and that he insisted on being allowed permission to visit her. Nothing but his own eyes could satisfy him of her actual recovery. He also wrote to Emily, enclosed the truant letter, and the following day set off for Allerton.

In the meantime what had become of the fair disconsolate? Emily had certainly quite fulfilled her duty of being miserable enough in the first instance. Nothing could be duller than the little village to which was consigned the Ariadne of Allerton. Day after day she roamed—not along the beach, but along the fields towards the post-office, for the letter which, like the breeze in Lord Byron's calm, “came not.” A fortnight elapsed, when one morning, as she was crossing the grounds of a fine but deserted place in the neighbourhood, she was so much struck by the beauty of some pink May, that she stopped to gather it;—alas! like most other pleasures, it was out of her reach. Suddenly, a very elegant looking young man emerged from one of the winding paths, and insisted on gathering it for her. The flowers were so beautiful, when gathered, that it was impossible not to say something in their praise, and flowers lead to many other subjects. Emily discovered that she was talking to

the proprietor of the place, Lord Elmsley—and, of course, apologised for her intrusion. He equally, of course, declared that his grounds were only too happy in having so fair a guest.

Next they met by chance again, and, at last, the only thing that made Emily relapse into her former languor was—a wet day; for then there was no chance of seeing Lord Elmsley. The weather, however, was, generally speaking, delightful—and they met, and talked about Lord Byron—nay, read him together;—and Lord Elmsley confessed that he had never understood his beauties before. They talked also of the heartlessness of the world; and the delights of solitude in a way that would have charmed Zimmerman. One morning, however, brought Lord Elmsley a letter. It was from his uncle, short and sweet, and ran thus:—

“My dear George,

“Miss Smith’s guardians have at last listened to reason—and allow that your rank is fairly worth her gold. Come up, therefore, as soon as you can and preserve your interest with the lady. What a lucky fellow you are to have fine eyes—for they have carried the prize for you! However, as women are inconstant commodities at the best, I advise you to lose no time in securing the heiress.

“Your affectionate uncle,

“E.”

“Tell them,” said the Earl, “to order post-horses immediately. I must be off to London in the course of half an hour.”

During this half hour he dispatched his luncheon, and,—for Lord Elmsley was a perfectly well-bred man,—dispatched the following note to Miss Worthington, whom he was to have met that morning to show her the remains of the heroary:—

“My dear Miss Worthington,

“Hurried as I am I do not forget to return the volume of Lord Byron you so obligingly lent me. How I envy you the power of remaining in the country this delightful season—while I am forced to immure myself in hurried and noisy London. Allow me to offer the best compliments of

“Your devoted servant,

“ELMSLEY.”

No wonder that Emily tore the note which she received with smiles and blushes into twenty pieces, and did not get up to breakfast the next day. The next week she had a bad cold, and was seated in a most disconsolate-looking attitude and shawl, when a letter was brought in. It contained the first epistle of Edward’s, and the following words in the envelope:—

“My adored Emily,

“You may forgive me—I cannot forgive myself. Only imagine that the inclosed letter has by some strange chance remained in my desk, and I never discovered the error till this morning. You would pardon me if you knew all I have suffered. How I have reproached you! I hope to see you to-morrow, for I cannot rest till I hear from your own lips that you have forgiven

“Your faithful and unhappy

“EDWARD.”

That very morning Emily left off her shawl, and discovered that a walk would do her good. The lovers met the next day, each looking a little pale—which each set down to their own account. Emily re-

turned to Allerton, and the town was touched to the very heart by a constancy that had stood such a test.

"Three months' absence," as an old lady observed, "is a terrible trial." The guardians thought so too—and the marriage of Emily Worthington to Edward Rainsforth soon completed the satisfaction of the town of Allerton. During the bridal trip, the young couple were one wet day at an inn looking over a newspaper together, and there they saw—the marriage of Miss Smith with the Earl of Elmsley—and of Miss Alford with Sir John Belmore. I never heard that the readers made either of them any remark as they read. They returned to Allerton, lived very happily, and were always held up as touching instances of first love and constancy—in the 19th century.

L. E. L.
