Lucien Barthelemy was what the world commonly calls an eccentric man. While he didn't effect to despise ordinary people yet he seemed to have no desire to mingle with them, no doubt considering himself better company. Said one of his friends of him:

"I can't exactly say that his presence among us is depressing, yet the truth is we don't amuse ourselves so well when he is with us. He weighs upon our spirits. Not that he says anything unpleasant, far from it, but still, in spite of efforts to the contrary, we are not quite ourselves when Lucien is with us. His wine is always two-thirds water, he orders only one dish, he doesn't use tobacco in any form, he has an aversion to hunting, doesn't want to kill anything, he says. Nevertheless, he is not a bad fellow. He can laugh when he chooses, especially when there are any children about. He prefers their society; he puts himself on their level. Lack of confidence in himself? Oh, no; he is a graduate of the college of medicine, he has a wonderful knowledge of books, and always has a book thrust into some one of his pockets, but he never reads when in company, for he is a deep student of human nature, so much so that he seems to have been acquainted with every one in the world when he came into it and be merely meeting you again when you are first presented to him, for without any preliminaries he at once chooses a topic of conversation which is interesting to you.

"I can't tell you," continued this friend, "what Lucien's religion is. He never goes to church, and yet he and the cure are the best of friends. Only once was he ever seen at mass. It was a mournful occasion, the death of his mother. Every one was in tears excepting Lucien, yet he loved his mother dearly. In the last year of her life she had not been able to walk. Lucien had carried her about in open air for hours every day. You know he is superbly built and has the strength of a giant, and had amused her as she lay in his arms like a child by telling her fairy and other stories with an arch grace and delicate pathos that would have made a publisher's fortune if the stories could have been taken down by a stenographer. At times she would fall asleep. Then he would lay her down on a bench, sit down beside her and draw forth the ever present book.

"His mother was a woman of strong character, and at her request her son gave her due notice of approaching death. The entire night preceding her dissolution Lucien sat alone by her bedside. This was as she desired, every one else was sent to bed.

"I have often asked myself," said this friend, "what they talked about on that last night, which must have been a long one, and at the end of which Mme. Barthelemy passed away gently, quietly, peacefully, without a pain or a pang, her son's hand clasped in her's. No; the cure was not called in, but he had dined with Lucien the day previous at the bedside of the sick woman. When, a few weeks after, I spoke to Lucien in admiration of this beautiful passing away of his mother, he replied in a low voice.

"'Everyone can die in the same way; all that is necessary is to give five minutes thought to death every day of one's life.'

"'And do you think that we shall meet again,' I asked.

"'There can be no doubt of it,' he replied.

"'Where, how, in what form?' I queried.

"'I don't know,' was his answer, 'and the reason why I don't know is because it is no affair of mine.'

"'Then why do you affirm that we shall meet again?'

"'Because I know we shall,' he said calmly."

Lucien was one of those men who, while not arguing to the point, are none the less convincing.

"Was it at all surprising," continued this friend of Barthelemy's, "that Lucien should have peculiar notions on the subject of marriage? I think not. Anyway he did have such notions. I have it from his own lips. Said he to me one day:

"'I want to impress upon your mind firmly that I am not one of those who think that in a civilization like ours perpetual bonds should be laid upon a human being, no matter with what solemnity the contract may have been entered into. Fate has not the power to modify the past and man has no right to speak for the future. Let signatures support what they are set under in commercial transactions, but this cannot be so in moral compacts, subject as they are both to the variability of our ideas and feelings. These compacts must be purely voluntary, and it is the soul's inalienable right to take possession of itself again when it discovers that either under duress or undue influence it surrendered unwisely. Marriage is purely a moral compact into which the man, generally speaking, goes knowingly, with full knowledge of what he is doing, but the woman gropingly, blindly. In my opinion the man alone is entitled to be called a contracting party.

"'When once the marriage has been solemnized,' continued Lucien, 'it devolves upon the man by every possible means to win over to him and incorporate into his existence this outside party of whom he often gets possession by surprise, by rose, by deceit, and his own fault is it if he fails to accomplish this, for having had perfect liberty so to do he should, before asking her to become his wife, have made a close study of the young girl and given her up if he deemed her unfit for or unworthy of him. Let us hope that the time is close at hand when fathers and mothers will prepare their children differently for marriage so that the contracting parties will know beforehand what a magnificent partnership they have it in their power to enter into by simply pronouncing the word yes. Civilization, I grieve to say, has not gone as far as this. It will be necessary for women to learn many things which will be kept from them a long time yet. There will be no true marriage until choice on the part of both shall be absolutely free and there shall be full and complete knowledge in both of reciprocal rights and duties. Until that day comes there is but one court competent to pass upon this question, and that is conscience.'"

Surely no one will wonder at it when told that Lucien Barthelemy's forty-fifth birthday found him still unmarried. Physically Lucien was in the very bloom of manhood, his broad shoulders carrying a magnificent head, with a great wealth of curly brown hair thrown boldly back, while a full beard of a lighter tone ill concealed the placidity and sweetness of his smile. His forehead indicated spirituality as his straight eyebrows denoted firmness, energy, obduracy if necessary in opinions as in actions; while his clear blue eyes, a porcelain blue, beamed with mingled intelligence and kindliness. This handsome face was set upon a chin of great beauty, which, like a pedestal, imparted an air of dignity and self control to it, and held it up, so to speak, for the admiring and sympathetic glances of the looker on to rest upon. In spite of the few gray hairs which dilligent search might have found in that thick fleece of brown, Lucien still looked the young man. In studying his hands the skilled palm reader would have discovered unmistakable signs pointing to that union of imagination and will of faith and reason, of love of the ideal and need of independence which is found in all men whose minds, whose consciences, whose souls are in open conflict with the world.

While yet in his forty-fifth year Lucien fell in love.

Largely from a sense of devotion to his mother's memory, Lucien had been accustomed from time to time to pay a visit to various old friends of hers, among them the Duclos, people in good circumstances and of considerable refinement. Mme. Duclos had come from beyond the Pyrenees, and had all the beauty and grace of the Spanish woman. Her daughter, Madeline, when a mere child felt the personal charm of the "big gentleman," as she called Lucien, and play was abandoned and dolls hastily thrown aside to enjoy the privilege of sitting at his feet.

Barthelemy has the power of holding enchained the attention of any listener. It was marvelous. His words had coloring, suppleness, strength, elasticity; they could be somber, gay, luminous, solemn; as his voice delivered them they affected the audience like a Beethoven symphony.

Lucian knew his power and delighted to exercise it. Upon no one was he more successful than upon Madeleine. The moment he opened his mouth she yielded to the fascination of his voice, sitting at his feet, with her glorious dark eyes riveted upon his face, as if a spell were upon her. There was manifestly a counter influence upon him, for his eyes never quitted her.

It was M. Duclos' custom to adjourn to the garden when the weather was fair, in order to enjoy coffee and dessert in the open air; and here, with his magnificent head reaching almost to the roses above him, with the dark green of the bower sharpening the noble outlines of his face and heightening the almost womanlike delicacy of his coloring, Lucien, at Madeline's request, was always ready to show the fertility of his fancy by inventing some quaint story in which everyday maidens and masters, fairy mothers and obedient spirits were brought into delightful contiguity. Madeleine never failed to reward the story teller by setting half a dozen kisses upon his bearded cheek.

One evening as he wrapped his arm around this child and drew her toward him he suddenly felt a deep blush

BARTHELEMY HAS THE POWER OF HOLDING ENCHAINED THE ATTENTION OF ANY LISTENER.

mantling his face and a strange clogging of his heart's action. Madeline was no longer a child, she was a woman. Lucien's arm dropped by his side, and he drew away from her. He could not tell why, he only knew that he was all in a tremble, and for the first time in his life his mind became suddenly clouded, his ideas grew dim and shadowy and his words slipped away from him.

In a few moments he rose and hurried away on some pretence or other, slinking out of his friend's house with a feeling of shame that both bewildered and terrified him. But she was beside him, she was following him, her soft voice was murmuring in his ear, her arm was about his neck, he could not escape her. No book was abstruse enough, no author profound enough, to stay her steps, to stop her at the threshold of his library.

She crossed it; she smiled upon him; she spoke to him in a voice of entrancing sweetness; she sat down; she made herself at home. He watched her, listened to her with mingled bliss and wonder. She was but the Madeleine of his imagination, but she was just as soft and gentle and lovable as the real Madeleine whom he had quitted in the bower of Duclos' garden a few hours before.

M. and Mme. Duclos were delighted with the discovery of Lucien's affection for their daughter. True, she was yet too young to marry, just verging, as she was, toward 16; but her beauty was unfolding like a flower, and while its steady increase carried joy to Lucien's heart it kept Madeleine's mother busy lengthening skirts and enlarging sleeves and corsages.

"But," laughed Mme. Duclos, "M. Lucien is such a sensible man, so unlike other men. He can easily wait a year for our dear child."

Madeleine was not tall, but her figure was possessed of that delightful roundness which has inspired more sudden fancies than real love; more songs than odes; more vaudevilles than dramas. At a glance one might have been inclined to use that vulgar, but really technical term, dumpy. Very small and shapely hands and feet, black hair, naturally wavy, black eyebrows, almost meeting above the nose, which had the gentlest of upward tilts; large eyes, gloriously deep and dark, with the bistre tone above them, and the pearl tint below; cheeks rosy and red and teeth as white as July almonds—such was this child woman. Place some red roses in those black tresses, wrap a lace mantilla about her face, set a fan in motion in one of those hands and drape that round but flexible form with a shortened skirt, and you would have an Andalusian.

Madeleine was the daughter of her mother. If you had gone far enough back you would have found one of her ancestors among the builders of the Alhambra, possibly even living beneath its roof. It was rich blood, therefore, of the color of melted coral, which coursed through her veins. And yet a close observer would have noted the changes which the loss of the Southern sun had wrought in this transplanted type.

The wedding day came on apace. It so happened that a few weeks before the appointed day an Italian opera troupe began a series of performances in the town. Madeleine was passionately fond of music, and with her intended's knowledge and consent, in fact sometimes in his company, she attended every representation. Lucien noted how the singing stirred her very soul, and was gratified by the keen enjoyment she drew from it. The tenor singer, Angelo Liverino, a strikingly handsome young man, who walked the stage like an Apollo and sang with the deep feeling of an Orpheus, soon became the rage of the town. Petted and feted by everyone, and entertained by the best families, he set a hundred hearts aflame on his triumphal course, but seemed to take no hurt himself until he met Madeline. In an instant the two warm souls flashed together, the two children of the south land met after many long years of separation.

One evening when Lucien entered the home of his affianced, he found Mme. Duclos lying senseless on the floor and her husband kneeling beside her, himself but little this side of dementia. Madeleine had eloped with Angelo Liverino.

It had only struck 9 when Lucien parted with M. and Mme. Duclos, and yet it was past midnight when he presented himself at his apartments. Here were three whole hours absolutely cut out of his lifetime. During this time he had been dead to himself and he only came back to life when his servant, in response to his knock, opened the door and called him by name. Then he remembered who he was and what had happened to him. His clothes were covered with dust and his feet were so swollen that his boots had to be slit open to get them off. Manifestly he had walked many miles, for his strength, great as it was, was gone. He staggered to a chair and asked for water. He was burning up with thirst. His servant begged for permission to summon a physician, but Lucien shook his head and directed him to go to bed. The man reluctantly obeyed after he had vainly tried to persuade his master to remove his clothes and go to rest first himself.

Nature is more merciful than men give her credit for. Like murderous blows, great agonies so dull sensibility that little pain is felt. The terrible hurt mercifully brings unconsciousness with it. Some sorrows are so heavy that the sufferer is crushed beneath the load. He cannot even cry out; a chill almost of death steals over him. He is dead, for real death could not be so horrible.

When Lucien's servant re-entered his room the next morning he was startled to find his master sitting with his clothes on, just as he had left him. He had not stirred from the chair into which he had fallen upon his return home after those three hours of mad pursuit, and then, as the man drew the curtains aside and let the sun's rays into the room, he uttered a stifled cry of horror, for great flecks of gray streaked that glorious head of hair. In a single night grief had wrought this devastation; in a few brief hours a speechless woe had set its ghastly finger marks upon this bright page of humanity. Nor did despair stop there. In a few weeks the change was complete; that luxuriant growth of hair—crown of strong and perfect manhood—was silvered o'er to its very roots. But gradually the paroxysm spent its force, and like came to cure like when Lucien looked upon the terrible woe now nested in that little home and listened to the lamentations of that old couple so cruelly deserted.

In a few days letters came from Madeleine, both to her parents and to Lucien, announcing her marriage to Angelo and promising to return home in a few months, when they had quieted down and had come to look upon her action in a calm and reasonable way, which of course was now impossible.

To Lucien she wrote as follows:

(To be continued.)

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