

Miss Wickersham's Romance.

BY M. C. FARLEY

It was an old, old house. Teddy looked up at the many gabled, moss-grown roof, and the faded red-brick walls with feelings of both anger and sorrow.

He was the only heir. In the natural course of events Wickersham farm and the old ivy-grown mansion, built in Colonial times, would be his own, providing he did nothing to offend his aunt.

Teddy groaned inwardly at the recollection. For two and twenty years Miss Wickersham had been a mother to him. If some people declared that Miss Wickersham had no heart, and was proud and overbearing in disposition and hard to please—her nephew at least had never been made to feel that side of her nature until now.

Some six months previous Maj. Willis had returned from Europe with his daughter, and settled down quietly at Fern Fields, a tumble-down old manor house, which report said was all there was left to him of the once great Willis fortune.

The Major had lived abroad the better part of his life. His child had been born on a foreign land, and his wife was buried there. Still, for some unknown reason, he had gathered together the remnants of his once splendid fortune, and, coming home to Fern Fields, was now Miss Wickersham's nearest neighbor.

From the very day of the Major's return to the home of his boyhood, Miss Wickersham had persistently ignored him. Fern Fields, she said, was nothing to her—he wanted nothing what ever to do with the people who lived there, and cautioned her nephew, upon pain of her displeasure, never to have the slightest intercourse with the Willis family.

All went smooth for a short time, when, in some unaccountable manner, Teddy and the Major's daughter chanced to meet, and Ted felt her over heels in love with her at first sight. What was his consternation to find, upon acquainting his aunt with the turn of affair, that she suddenly flew into a violent passion and ordered him never to speak to the young lady again. It was all very easy for Miss Wickersham to execute such a command, but it was simply impossible for Teddy to obey it.

There were stolen interviews and long walks by the river-side, and many an hour was spent in company with the Major himself, when Ted found it impossible to investigate the young lady out of doors. Of course there could be but one ending to the affair. Reckless Ted proposed, was accepted, and the Major gave them both his paternal blessing.

Proud and happy the young man went home to his aunt and told her plainly what he had done, not doubting but that she would accept the inevitable, with tolerable grace at least, when he found it was to be. But he was appalled at her manner.

"If you marry that girl, Teddy, not a cent of my money shall you ever have!" screamed Miss Wickersham at the top of her shrill old voice. "I detest the whole family, root and branch, and there shall not a dollar's worth of my property ever go to benefit one of them in any way if I can help myself, and I guess I can."

Teddy's face fell. It was a bright, handsome, young face, framed in wavy, a lot of low hair, that was his aunt's special pride though she was too much overcome with rage now to pay any attention to his good looks.

"Just to think," he went on, in a hoarse, high quivering key, "that of a person in the world, you should see Natalie Willis to be your wife, and you know very well, Teddy, what my opinion is of the Willis family—a poor, proud, shiftless set, to make the best of them."

Teddy grew very red. "If rumor is true, Aunt Wickersham you did not always rate the Willis' at such a low figure—particularly the Major," retorted he, indignantly.

The pale pink that yet lingered in Miss Wickersham's face faded and turned suddenly to a livid carotid. She choked, and he flattered an instant.

"This from you, Teddy," said she reproachfully.

Directly he had the grace to feel ashamed of himself.

"Forgive me, aunt," he cried, "I am a brute."

"Say no more," said she coldly, motioning him to leave the room, the delicate color in her face having now faded entirely out giving place to a dull, leaden hue, not pleasant to see.

Once alone, she went to a foreign cabinet that stood in one corner of the apartment, and, unlocking the door, took therefrom a small parcel.

"It seems strange how the folly of my youth yet clings to me in my old age," she mused, bitterly, turning the package over in her still white and shapely hands.

"I will burn these things. Perhaps forgetfulness will come the more readily," she uttered to herself, undoing the parcel, and dropping a bunch of withered roses on the desk.

Still, she hesitated, a thousand memories of a bygone time, struggling through her mind, and a suspicious moan was dimming the brightness of her proud, dark eyes.

"She would only be at his heart," she cried at last, impatiently. "They are coquette, all father and daughter alike. Teddy shall not have his life spoiled by her—the false daughter-of-an-unworthy parent."

An instant later and she had flung the little packet into the grate. There was a sudden light puff and a strong perfume from the burning roses, filled the room. The parlor door was thrown open. "Maj. Willis," announced the servant. The room seemed to swim around her, for a moment. She could not have been more astonished to hear a clap of thunder from a clear heaven.

A feeling of anger brought back her usual self-possession.

"To what am I indebted for this visit, Maj. Willis," she asked with freezing politeness.

"To be frank—various causes. I am here, principally in behalf of the future well being of our young people," replied the Major, bravely.

"If you are trying to negotiate a marriage between those two, you may as well know, first as last, that I shall ever consent to it," said Miss Wickersham, ignoring the fact that her visitor was still standing, hat in hand, before her.

The Major bit his lip.

He glanced critically at his obdurate hostess, as she, too, rose to her full height, and confronted him, her face pale, her eyes flashing, and her white ringed fingers tightly clasping the edge of the old cabinet she remembered of yore.

It was thirty years since he had entered that house for the last time, as he supposed. He was a young man then, gay and handsome, and very much in love indeed, with the angry lady before him. Thirty years. It was a long time, and yet, how well he remembered even the smallest detail of the room. Nothing was changed now, he thought with a cynical smile save himself and the little old maid, who so ungraciously received him. Unconsciously the Major fetched a deep sigh.

It was evident that, if Miss Wickersham had unhappy memories of the long ago, the doctory Major also had a few that were not so pleasant as they might have been.

"It seems a great pity," said he, receding himself with an effort, "that two young lives should be made miserable because of a mere whim. Lead me to you to speak to you about the settlements I shall make my daughter on the occasion of her marriage. I am not rich, still she will have no mean dowry."

"We will not discuss the subject of your daughter's marriage, as it concerns me no, the slightest. I have this to say, if my nephew persists in making Miss Willis his wife, I shall execute a will cutting him off with a penny dollar. My determination is unchangeable."

There was the least little bit of an angry sparkle in the corner of the Major's eye.

"Miss Willis will not marry for money," said he, quietly shifting his position a little, and resting his elbow on the low marble piece. "My daughter's happiness is my only consideration."

Miss Wickersham noticed indeed she could not well help it—what a fine-looking man the Major was, in spite of his fifty years. Her heart throbbed a trifle faster as she thought of days long gone past.

"But for her dear sake," continued the Major, "I should not again cross the threshold of this house, Rebecca."

"That is like a man," remarked Miss Wickersham, with biting sarcasm. "But I let it pass. My nephew is of age, and will undoubtedly do as he likes in this matter."

The Major leaned a little more heavily on the marble piece, his elbow in dangerous proximity to and old, dilapidated plaster bust of Franklin. He glanced at it casually, and then returned with a pang the last time he had looked upon it—thirty years before.

"I shall be sorry to have Ted lose his inheritance for my daughter's sake," said the Major presently, putting his hand to his eyes as if to shut out the sight of the room, and the memories it recalled. "But there seems to be no help for it. This being the case, perhaps it might be as well to bring this interview to a close."

Miss Wickersham bowed stiffly. Cold, proud, relentless, she stood there waiting for him to go.

"I might argue as successfully with the Sphinx," thought he, bringing his hand down forcibly on the marble.

The next instant the plaster cast toppled over and fell crashing against the old-fashioned brass andirons, and lay shivered in a hundred fragments on the floor.

Miss Wickersham gave a little hysterical shriek and fled to the rescue.

Curious his carelessness, the Major scooped down to help gather up the pieces.

Could he believe his eyes? Right there, with unbroken wafer, was a letter he had himself written, long, long ago.

Miss Wickersham picked it up wondering, as she saw her own name on the face of it.

"It is strange had this note ever come in here," said she, breaking the seal slowly.

The Major how not gone so dithering gait those years to no purpose. His military experience had taught him wisdom and not a otisly wisdom, but patience as well. So he waited quiet, but she finished reading the yellow old love-letter.

Miss Wickersham was crying now very softly—very softly, indeed—but the wary Major saw it and took courage.

"You must have known how much I loved you, Rebecca, in that past which seems now so far away," said he, recovering his voice. "After months of hope and fear and anxiety and doubt, I determined to know my fate. I called upon you one day with the intention of telling you all this, but you were not at home. Feeling that further suspense would be unendurable, I wrote that note, here in this room, and placing it on top of that old plaster bust of Franklin, went away, expecting shortly to hear from you. Weeks went past and you did not reply. You know the rest. Hurt and angry, I went to Europe, enlisted, was wounded and sent home to die. I was nursed back to health by a gentle girl, the mother of my daughter Nellie, and I came here, on the death of my wife, to pass the remainder of my days."

"And I have lived all these years believing you had amused yourself by winning my heart only to throw it away," sobbed Miss Wickersham.

"Never!" ejaculated the Major with energy. "It has been a terrible mistake all around, all from first to last."

"That plaster-cast had a crevice in the top of it. The note must have slipped into it in that way," said she, meditatively.

"Well, Rebecca, I have waited a long time—this year for your reply. I must have my answer," he persisted.

"But we are old now," objected Miss Wickersham, her heart in a flutter.

"The older, the better," said he, bravely. "My dear, true lover is like wine, improved by age."

"But what will Teddy say?" cried she, fairly, quite willing to be persuaded, when the persuader was the lover of her youth.

"Teddy gives his free consent, and wishes you a long life, full of happiness, in the bargain," said a voice from the doorway. "And we'll be one family, after a while, won't we, Maj.?" cried Ted, embracing his aunt.

"Thank God, we will indeed," replied the Major. And they were.—Chicago Ledger.

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If it is an advantage to the physician, or the lawyer, or the minister, to receive instruction in the principles and knowledge pertaining to their several professions, then it is none the less advantageous to the farmer to be instructed in the principles of agricultural science. Agriculture is one of the most difficult sciences. It is made up of several subordinate sciences, and an understanding of its principles requires an acquaintance with chemistry, botany, zoology, and several other sciences.

The soil is a vast laboratory in which the most complex chemical transformations are going forward, and it is for the farmer to understand, direct, retard or hasten these changes, and thus promote the growth of the plants he cultivates. The successful farmer must not only be acquainted with the science of agriculture, but must also know how to apply that knowledge in the practice of the art of agriculture.

It is true a man will succeed fairly well as a farmer who only understands the art of agriculture, but a knowledge of the science is needed in order to furnish general principles upon which to practice the art, and make progress in improvement. The man who only knows the practical part of agriculture does not understand the why and wherefore, and will not be able to vary his operations to meet the changed conditions which are continually arising.

His success in farming will be more of the "luck" order, instead of resting on any substantial basis. The scientific agriculturist will be able to surmount all obstacles and ensure success.

Our most successful and most prosperous farmers are those who have the best understanding of their business. Many of these men do not claim to be educated men. They never received while at school a day's instruction in agriculture, but they have been class students of the science since they began farming. They are keen observers, they learn from experience, from nature, and from the operation of others; they read the best agricultural books; they attend the agricultural meetings, and participate in the discussions, or list actively to what others say. In all those ways they have been educating themselves, and by dint of close application, have supplied in part the lack of early instruction in agricultural science.

There is ample scope for the farmer to use all the education that he can acquire, and no one need abandon agriculture in order to seek employment which will call forth all the powers of the mind. In grappling with the many questions which are pressing upon the attention of agriculturists, and demanding a high, the most active and vigorous intellect will find ample exercise.

When the farmer enters upon the practice of agriculture, however thorough his preparatory education has been, he has just begun the educational course of his life. As an active and progressive agriculturist, he will be a close student, and learn daily more and more in regard to his life work. The better the preparatory education and training of the farmer, the better will be his start in life, and in order to give all a fair start, it is highly essential that the instruction given in our common schools should be such as will be a large extent, of practical value to the farmer. That a change can be made in the course of study pursued in the common schools, so as to strain this subject, can easily be demonstrated. This is a matter of the utmost importance to farmers and all interested in education.

TAKE CARE OF OUR LIVE STOCK. Good Shelter.—It is absolute economy to provide warm and comfortable winter quarters for a live stock, with an ample supply of pure fresh air. When animals are housed in well made barns and stables they require much less food to keep them in a good condition. Lumber, in this form, is of cheaper than hay and grain for wintering farm stock. Pure water in abundance is very essential for the health of the animals. It should be drank freely from the well. If left in the trough to freeze, it soon becomes as cold as ice water, and when taken into the animal system, it requires much heat of the body to bring it up to the required temperature. Avoid as far as possible having the watering troughs partly filled with ice and snow. They may be kept so as to freeze over when not in use, and this keeps them clean and free from the chilling ice.

Live stock should be fed regularly. Even if not generously fed, this regularity is better than an excess for a few days, and then a lack of food for a time. Animals are never contented when hungry, and they should not be permitted to thus become uneasy. The damage done by one or two feedings can not be made good by a double ration afterwards. This slipshod method of feeding is quite sure to bring disorder into the flock or stable.

Horses.—An idle team may be wintered upon good hay alone, but when lightly worked, a little grain at no time may be needed. They are to be kept in good health and flesh, and the amount of grain should be governed accordingly. Horses doing heavy work will need a few quarts of ground oats and corn daily, in addition to an abundance of the best hay. Young colts should have excellent care, for their future usefulness depend largely upon the growth they make the first winter.

Line of milk cows should be one of the best remedies for constipation in the young farm animals.

Cows.—As the weather begins to grow cold, the cows will fall off in milk unless an abundance of nutritious food is provided in the stalls. Beets cut or pulped and mixed with cut hay, to which a little meal is added, makes an excellent ration for milk cows. It is of the greatest importance to keep up the flow of milk at the beginning of winter. Calves and yearlings, with good feed and abundant litter, they will make a large amount of excellent manure before spring.

Sheep should be kept from the lambs, or they will crowd and rob the young stock. The flock may take a run on the stubble fields during warm days.

The ricks should all be filled before midwinter. Boys may be paid, by the dozen, for picking them off the stubble. Breeding ewes to have early nutrition lambs, they should be kept in a separate yard and fed, where they may have the most generous feeding.—American Agriculturist.

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