

Albany Register.

(From our Fireside Friend.)
The Borderer's Revenge.

BY WILLIAM H. BUSNELL.

"My son, is it true that you and Louise Mason are engaged to be married?"

Robert Earl looked up quickly and suspiciously at his old mother for a moment—paused in the work of casting bullets for his favorite rifle, and then a smile broke, like spring sunshine, over his mimic; if not handsome features, and he questioned rather than asked:

"Why, mother?"

"Because I fear she will trifl with you, Robert."

"Have you any good grounds for thinking so?"

"I have only your good at heart, my dear boy, and you must not feel hard at me for saying this, but she is not in the least to my mind—is too light, trifling, too fond of dress, and too proud of her good looks."

"She is very beautiful." He was thinking far more of the bright, blue eyes, tipples of gold brown hair, rose and white cheeks, trim figure, little feet and hands, and voice that was pleasant to his ears as the murmurings of bees over the fields of blossoming clover, than of what his only parent was saying.

"Handsome is a hand-some does," she continued, quoting a favorite adage with elderly people "you will find out when you have lived to my years," and she reached out her thin hands and laid them upon her green eyes, and then said, "Lu Mason, like a beauty, is upon her black curly locks, and her voice took a more tender tone as she continued: "Do you love her very much, my son?"

"Better than I believe I could ever love any one but you," was the straightforward answer.

"And does she love you, Robert?"

"Yes—I believe so."

"My poor child! I pray Heaven that nothing may ever come between you, But tell me what you would do if another should steal her away from you."

"One of us would have to die," was the sharp, stern and decisive response.

"You cannot mean the girl?"

"No! I could never injure one I had loved so well, but it would be dangerous play for any man. Mother, I love her as I could never love but once. And yet, it often seems strange to me that it should be so."

And so it appeared to others, and those who looked at the matter from a disinterested stand-point.

Louise Mason, both by birth and education, was very much the superior of the hunter-turned. Their education had been in a very different school. The common ones of the far West had been his only sources of instruction, while she had graduated with high honors at the East. And she had learned other teachings beside of books. Flattery had not been a strange story to her ear—she had been queen over a little empire—had been spoiled by society as well as by her widowed father.

And when misfortune came during one of the great commercial cyclones that periodically sweep over the country, and he was forced to gather his little all and commence life anew upon the frontier, many hearts had sighed with pity at her misfortune. At least, so she fancied then. But "out of sight, out of mind," proved true in her case, as it has done in thousands of others, and she was compelled to learn another and bitter lesson—that gold is the gloss which makes beauty sought after!

Driven, however, by circumstances from one sphere of action to another, she did not forget her triumphs, and found full play for her natural coquetry and the simple-minded but more honest-hearted—sharred them by her superior accomplishments—queened it over the rustic houses and the rustic fads as slaves to her chariot wheels, until at last the butterfly appeared to have been fairly caught—to have become satisfied to have its wings clipped and live but for a single瞬.

But many doubted the genuineness and stability of her affection, although no one could have been found more worthy than Robert Earl. And yet, with all his sterling qualities—his prospective wealth (in the rise of land), his warm and true heart, his frame of iron, his ambition and gentle manner when the strings of his heart were not swept by too harsh insult or wrong, he scarcely appeared to be a fitting mate for the one he had chosen to travel by his side through the journey of life, even to the dark ending.

And had not the girl mistaken her own feelings? Was it indeed love—such love as a woman should feel for the man she intended to make her husband, that swayed her, or had she mistaken the inspiration? Mrs. Earl so thought, and expressed her opinion freely in her confidential conversation with her son.

"Have you ever reflected, Robert," she asked, "that Louise Mason may be in error about her loving you as well as both you and she fancy?"

"Why?" he asked in wide-eyed astonishment.

"You saved her life at the risk of your own."

"I did as any man would have done under like circumstances."

"But as no one thought or had the bravery to do but yourself," she answered looking upon him with pride.

"I only happened to be the nearest," still making light of and not seeking to gain glory for his actions, still with the modesty that always accompanied true courage.

"Ah! my boy, you may deny it as you will, but Louise Mason would have perished had you not leaped into the boiling river, swam among the rushing, churning, grinding logs and brought her safely to the shore. I do not find fault with the action, would not have had you done otherwise than you did for all the world, and yet, it awoke in the heart of the girl gratitude, which is easily mistaken for a mere passion and thus led to your engagement. Have you ever thought of this?"

"No, mother," and his face wore a

serious and troubled look and became deadly pale. "No, I have never thought of it but, but will find out."

Action rather than reflection. Motive rather than speculative philosophy is the fate of such men; and leaving his occupation, forgetting all about the hunting expedition that had promised so much pleasure, he threw his rifle over his shoulder and turned his steps towards the village where the father of the girl he loved kept the store.

It was in the early autumn time—October—when the russet dress of nature is made glorious by the interplay of gold and vermillion hues; when

"The popular drift their leafage down."

In flakes of gold below,
And bushes burn like twilight fires
That used to tell of snow;
And maple bursting into flame,
Set all the wood afire.
And Summer, her evergreens,
Sees Paradise draw nigher;

The sun puts on a human look,

Behind the hazy day;

The mid-year moon of silver,

Is strikingly in gold!"

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"How could I be? Who has been talking to you, some infelicitous talker?" he asked sharply, and his black eyes flashed so vividly as to cause her to shudder. "Have they? Yes, with a sigh. I believe they exercise it, and that is the reason I wish you to give a direct answer to my question. It is one—to use your own words—that I have an 'undoubt-ed right' to ask."

"You are in a strange mood, Robert," and she tapped the neck of her pony unmercifully with her whip.

"My question is this," he continued without giving the slightest heed to her interruption, "and I wish you to consider well what answer you make to it: do you love me as a wife should love her husband?"

"What nonsense! How often do you want me to tell you the same thing? Of course I love you."

"Are you certain that it is not simply pride?"

"I couldn't help but be grateful to you for saying my life, Oh! that horrid River! It makes me shudder whenever I think of it and the rushing logs, and all that. It was very brave of you, Robert."

"But is not gratuity all? Have you not been mi-akne in your feelings towards me, Lu?"

"How could I be? Who has been talking to you, some infelicitous talker?" he asked sharply, and he rested one hand lightly upon her shoulder and bent her face down to him for a kiss, saying, "No one shall make trouble between us, Robert."

It was not in his nature to withstand the soft words and gentle, sweet caresses of a woman, and this more especially one so beautiful and whom he loved. And for a time, at least, he did hear the current whispers of her flattery; but he not only closed his eyes but he became more deeply infatuated than ever before.

Therantus divided into winter and the holiday festivities were near at hand, the time when they were to be married appointed, and Robert Earl made great preparations for the occasion. But had he known the temper and heart of the girl he would have doubted even more than his mother had done: had he not been deaf he would have heard the current whispers of her flattery; but he not only closed his eyes but he became more deeply infatuated than ever before.

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For an hour there was scarcely a change in his position—scarcely less working of the muscles about the mouth—scarcely less mist before his sight. Then with a mighty effort he controlled himself—clashed his hands across his eyes as if ashamed of tears, raised up his form, lifted the rifle that had fallen and carefully wiped away the sweat.

The brief time he had passed to reflection—brief as we number time, but as a century of pain to him—had completely changed his nature. His hands again became as steady as if cast in stone. The lines upon his face had taken the shape of resolution, and his black eyes burned and flamed like those of the panther he could hear crying far away.

"They will go back by the other road," he muttered from his firmly compressed lips, as he arose, "and I will be in time;" and whatever his purpose, it would be carried through, though the headsmen had stood over him with uplifted ax!

With rapid strides he walked up the mountain side, and descended upon the other until he came to where the road turned suddenly, and almost at right angle—turned around sharply with rocks lifting their noisy heads high towards the clouds upon one side, and forming an almost perpendicular wall for the valley below—to dash over which would be an instantaneous and horrible death.

He drew in his breath and looked over—down for hundreds of feet upon rugged rocks, and a grim and dangerous smile lighted up his face for an instant, then he disappeared into the bushes upon the opposite side, and remained watching until the stars had risen—until the faint twinkling of alight

beams could be heard.

He went singing merrily about his work and his petted rifle hung unnoticed upon its leather bracket, notwithstanding the hints of the neighbors who dropped in to pass an evening he was a crack hunter and shot that he was "beautiful tracking snow," or that "the deer had not been so plenty before in years." Even his loving old mother had laughed a little at him, and at length she suggested that she was pleased with some venison, and what danger could possibly come to them?

That was enough for him. He had thought of leaving off work and taking Lu out riding the next day, but there was no danger of the snow melting, and he could as well do it the next. So the rifle was taken down and cleaned, bullets run and rimmed, patches cut and greased; and before long was a quiver of arrows in the east he was tramping swiftly through the woods to where he felt certain of finding game.

But once he was disappointed, and though he had gone many weary miles, it was not before he saw the slightest prospect of getting a shot. Then he sat upon recent tracks, and waited to see where the trail might lead him, as in either case he followed there would be uncertainty about his reaching home again early in the evening.

Standing about half-way up the mountain, he looked ahead and lost his sight with the country伸展ing before him. Then all was clear again, and a few rods would bring them to the dangerous turning. He raised up and stepped to the side of the road—waited breathless until the path was about to be rounded—then leaped before the team with a yell like that of an Indian, and a wild waving of arms!

The frightened horses sprang aside, and tore the reins from the hand of the careless driver. With frantic leaps they endeavored to turn, but the road was too narrow, the precipice too near—the footing too slippery! In the effort one fell—the other rolled over him, over the bows of the cartful, dragging the upended inmates with them to be mashed into a shapeless mass at the bottom!

No one had been saved. Even as the first cart was trembling upon the brink, the strong hand of Robert Earl had grasped the flailing girl and drawn her backwards, though he came very near being dragged over. Then, tossing her backwards, he crept to the extreme verge, leaned over, and heard the commingled shrieks of the horses and the man as they were whirled downwards—then a terrible thud and crash. He fell backwards, awed and trembling.

Senseless in the middle of the road lay Louise Mason, and by her side knelt her once lover, until the commotion aroused him. Then he darted into the bushes, and when he reached home, or how he entered, his mother never knew—knowing of his having come until she saw his rifle hanging in its usual place.

The little town rang with the news of the accident—that a pair of horses and driver had been buried over the rocks and Lu Mason, very infamously, saved. Robert Earl asked a few questions and made no comments when the story was told to him. Even his mother never knew the part he had enacted in the terrible drama, though she did learn of the sickness of the girl and that her son had become a broken-hearted man. But, when she died he sold his property and turned his face towards the Pacific shores, leaving the girl he had loved to the terrible judgment of her own conscience.

Could there have been a greater punishment?

Was Robert Earl both blind and deaf?

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