

Legal Matrimony

It Was Found Essential to a Fortune.

By F. A. MITCHEL

"Either you shall marry Helen Gray or I will leave the property to your Cousin Edgar. Here are two wills, one in your favor, the other in favor of Edgar. If within one month you are not wedded to Helen, I will destroy the will leaving all to you. On your wedding day I will destroy the one leaving the estate to Edgar, making you sole beneficiary."

Thus spoke Martin Travers to his son, Walter. The elder Travers was a man of strong will, and his son had inherited it from him. The fortune had been accumulated by the father and his partner, William Gray, largely by Travers' dogged perseverance. Gray was a milder man, and Travers in time came to regard him as supplementary to the business. Travers had then forced him out. Gray had died in poverty, and Travers' conscience smote him. He proposed now to make what restoration he could—in his own way—by uniting the property after his death in his son, Walter Travers, and Gray's daughter and only child, Helen.

"How do you know that the girl will love me?" asked Walter.

"I don't, but I have little doubt the match can be arranged. She will not be likely to throw a half interest in \$700,000 over her shoulder, especially since she is obliged to earn her own living."

"Very well, father. I will think the matter over and let you know my decision."

Mr. Travers had another reason for his action in this matter. He knew

that his son was in a dangerous position. Walter had fallen under the influence of a woman ten years older than himself, his inferior socially, intellectually—indeed, in every way. Unknown to the son, the father had tried to buy her off, but was not willing to pay her price, she believing that she could get the boy and the fortune as well, for she held him enthralled.

Walter was of that dangerous age when a man is liable to become infatuated with any woman, good or bad. Nevertheless there were in him the germs of good sense. Instead of going to the woman who had fascinated him to pour their mutual trouble in her ear and ask her advice, he concluded to go to Helen Gray, tell her the whole story and make her a proposition he had in mind.

It was not a very pleasant statement to make, but Travers had prepared himself for it and got on better than might have been expected. He lingered longer than necessary on the preliminary statement in order to get up his courage for the main announcement.

Miss Gray listened to him attentively and without any especial expression of word or countenance until he told her of his love for another woman. Then a look of disappointment came over her face.

"And now," he said, having prepared the way for his proposition, "I suggest that we be legally and only legally married. I mean to accede to my father's stipulation. By such a marriage we will obtain a fortune, which we must forego without it."

There was a long silence between the two, which was at last broken by Miss Gray.

"I honor you, Mr. Travers," she said, "for your frankness, and you are acting with common honesty in not laying a plan to obtain a fortune under false pretenses. I will take what you have said under consideration. I have the advantage of you in this—I am fancy free."

In due time Miss Gray wrote Mr. Travers that she had decided to accept his proposition. "A statement of my reasons for doing so," she wrote, "would be very hard to make. Besides, they have not been called for. Under the circumstances what you propose is the only alternative both for you and for me between a fortune

and poverty.

Upon receipt of this note Walter informed his father that he had proposed to Miss Gray and had been accepted. Mr. Travers asked if the marriage would be bona fide, and Walter informed him that it would be legal. Travers after some thought said that if the parties would agree not to have the marriage annulled or get a divorce within five years he would be satisfied. Walter assented, stating that it was not his intention to get either an annulment or a divorce at any time. But he confessed that he reserved the right to love any woman other than his wife. There was a suspicion of a smile on his father's face as he assented to this proposition.

Walter Travers and Helen Gray were married without his saying anything to his inamorata about his coming marriage. The wedding took place privately of an afternoon, and the bride and groom went to live in a house provided by Mr. Travers, Sr. with a comfortable income besides. The two dined together in a friendly way in their new home, and after dinner Walter went out. He was going to announce his marriage to the woman he loved, to tell her that it was the best arrangement he could make for himself and for her and it was understood that he was free to love her so long as he lived.

But Walter got no further than a beginning. He began with the words "I have been married," whereupon the lady poured upon him such a torrent of abuse that he stood like one transfixed.

"And so that old heathen has kept you under his thumb, after all," she said in a rasping voice that he had never heard come from her before. "I always considered you a milkop, and now I am sure of it. Tell the woman you've married that she hasn't got much of a man with the fortune. I'm lucky in escaping that part of it anyway."

This is but a sample of what the woman poured out upon the man who, looking on love purely as a matter of sentiment, had come to tell her that the place she held in his heart would never be occupied by any one else. What she would have said to him had he begun at the other end of his confession—that all of his wealth he hereditarily did not accept; he had needed it, by

beginning with an announcement that she had lost a large fortune. Her flaming eyes, her rasping voice, her red face, her contempt for him, drove him out before she had finished.

"Heavens!" he exclaimed when he got out into the cool air. "What a horrible fate I have escaped!"

He walked the streets for an hour, then went to his house. His wife was just going to her room, but, noticing his agitation, delayed her going and asked him if anything serious had happened. He was in a mood to desire an ear into which to pour the shock he had received. She already knew of his infatuation; it only remained for him to tell how he had been disenchanted.

"If there was ever a contemptible assine, natural born fool," he began, "I am that person." Then he told her where he had been, of his confession and the effect it had had on the object of his previous adoration. "Why, just think," he went on, "what a horrible mess I would have got into if I had married that woman! Hell would have been heaven to it."

"You are indeed fortunate in escaping such a fate. I have believed that your father knew of this infatuation and one of his principal reasons in forcing you into the condition of legal matrimony with me was to get you out of the toils of an adventuress."

"Legal matrimony," repeated Walter, for the first time quieting down and pronouncing the words as if they hurt him.

"And now," continued Helen, "I will say this. Since your father's object in withdrawing you from this woman has been accomplished, whenever you and he concur in a request that this marriage between you and me be annulled I will consent."

The expression on Walter's face is not describable. He had received one blow during the evening; here was another. The realization suddenly came to him that for a bad woman he had exchanged a good one. Had he not been a fool he might possibly have won the girl whom his father had wished him to marry and now, instead of being in misery, he might be happy.

Helen started to leave him to go to her room. He gave her an imploring look.

"Don't go at once," he said. "I'm all broken up."

She hesitated, turned and said, "Ang-

thing I can do to comfort you I will do. But I realized before I consented to this match that I was giving up much in depriving myself of one to love me and whom I might love. With you it was different. You expected to find that comfort which is to be derived from a pure affection elsewhere."

Still that wistful look on his face remained.

"Come," she added, changing her tone to a more cheerful one; "let us not begin our life together repining. There are refreshments in the larder. We may play, as the children say, that this is a real wedding for us and be merry."

She summoned a maid and told her of several dishes to bring that would be appreciated for a night's supper. When the viands were served the pair sat down at the table. The bride placed dainty bits on her husband's plate, and after eating the toothsome food and looking into a pair of honest, sympathetic eyes Walter began to recover from the shock he had received, and it occurred to him that possibly, after all, he might win this girl for his real as well as his legal wife.

An hour passed, and they had become sufficiently chummy for Walter to express this hope. He was met by the assurance that, while the early romantic love period would not be theirs, they might grow with that more mature, stronger affection that comes through long companionship and a union of interest. This made the young husband's heart leap within him. He took her hand, bent toward her and kissed her.

This evening—eventful in the lives of these two persons—took place long enough ago to warrant the growing up almost to manhood and womanhood of several of their children. The father and mother have trained their offspring that in the matter of marriage they shall rely on older heads for approval of a life partner. This is not that they are to marry one repulsive to them or for gain, but that they are to guard against a miscellanea at an age when they are not capable of deciding wisely.

A growing chick will not thrive on short rations. If the right kind of food is fed there is little danger of overfeeding, especially if they are given plenty of range.

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