

GODEY'S LADY'S BOOK.

APRIL, 1845.

THE INTERCEPTED LETTER.

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(See Plate.)



HE girls had been gleaning all the morning. It was the season of harvest, when the maidens of an inland hamlet are relieved for awhile from the monotony of household employment and those in the light labours of rustic outdoor exercise. This is not only the season of health and gaiety, but peculiarly the season of love-making. Numberless partialities that had been for a long time quiescent, now assume form and utterance. Sighs and blushes become contagious in the many opportunities for primitive gallantry, and youths and maidens, hitherto indifferent to each other, store away many a pleasant association, which the long winter evenings will serve to revive, and these will become the nucleus around which will gather the sweet genialities of humble life.

Never did simple maiden, however lowly, glean in the harvest time neglectful of those little adornments possible to the vocation. The rich and abundant hair is sure to sweep the cheek in a manner the most becoming; a dash of coquetry lurks in the adjustment of the gipsy hat, that shades but does not hide the glowing face; the trim boddice betrays with harmless vanity the wealth it hardly conceals, and the loose sleeve be-

trays at will the roundness of an arm that is never guilty of an awkward movement. Then the short kirtle leaves room for us to admire the cunning foot and ankle, that look as if placed only for fun-loving within the uncouth shoe.

Then comes the pretty apron, which gives such an air of smartness to a round little person, imparts daintiness to the brief skirt, and the pockets are such pretty receptacles for the conscious fingers; the border, too, always available—ready to be plaited, smoothed down, or adjusted in those many demure dilemmas affected by rustic coquetry. It is the most expressive of garments to a country girl, her little treasury for all sorts of maidenly winningness; as intricate and important is its management to her as that of the fan to the Spanish lady. Under its cover she advances or retreats, smiles or blushes, is tender or disdainful, proud or coy. Woe to the unhappy youth who lingers near the tactics of a pretty apron!

The girls had been gleaning all the morning. As the noonday heat became oppressive, they seated themselves under the shade of a gnarled tree, whose immense trunk nearly concealed their persons; and when directly after James McTheene and Walter Boyd threw themselves upon the turf upon the other side, so intently were they engrossed in some favourite topic of interest, that they did not observe the proximity of the two girls, nor the movement of Nannie when she mischiev-

ously drew the vest of Walter aside and abstracted a letter from the pocket, which she gave Margaret to read while she kept watch upon the movements of the young men.

Margaret half opened the manuscript, and seeing that Walter, who was the poet of the village and admired by every body, besides being her own especial lover, had uttered his thoughts in verse, she doubted not that her own sweet self must be the source of his inspiration; she therefore read, with a smile upon her lip, just as content was in her heart.

As she went on, however, the smile died away; an amazed and sorrowful expression fell upon her fair brow, and the pressure of Nannie's bosom upon her shoulder was as the branding of an iron. Yet she did not shake it off; she did not spurn the unconscious cause of her growing grief; she did not address her less gently when they resumed their task; and when Walter Boyd passed her in the field, and his false fingers were pressed upon her own, she did not cast them from her;—she loved him, and bitterness only abides with hate.

That night, when old Jeannie came to recall her from the field, she wondered at the paleness of her grandchild.

"I fear ye maun be sun-struck, my bonnie bairn; and there is Walter Boyd glowerin' after ye. Ill luck gang wi' him."

This time the "God forbid" of poor Margaret was fainter than usual, for it may be she began to discern a reason for the instinctive prejudice of the single-hearted dame.

The next day Margaret was too ill to go abroad; and when Walter Boyd besought to see her, Jeannie peremptorily refused, declaring "nae good could come o' it; her bairn was nae to be talked to like any strapping lass that maun be fashed by his foolish sangs."

Walter Boyd persisted, and urged day after day, and was not to be repulsed till Margaret herself refused to see him. He then wrote her the following lines, which certainly are the language of feeling, whatever may be said as to their poetic merit.

"TO MARGARET.

"Oh, maiden, all too cold and proud art thou—
Too unforgiving to thy truant lover;
Yet wildly as I loved, I love thee now—
My heart was thine, though fancy proved a rover.

"Take back that heart, now doubly made thine own;
It sinks, all hopeless, in its dull despairing,
Nor knew, till now, how all bereft and lone
It might be left, when ceased thy gentle caring."

Walter Boyd was a gay youth, and however permanent may have been the impression made by Margaret, he was able to cast off the appearance of grief, and to wear the semblance of one to whom impressions come and go like the shadows upon the hill-side of a summer-day. He was one to whom love is a necessity, while the object is a matter of little comparative moment, except as a point of poetic fancy. It may be that the earnest-

ness and devotedness of Margaret's character, while it called forth a deeper response, became, also, at times, a reproach to his own lighter temperament.

Whatever might have been the fact, he was grave for awhile, and then the pretty Nannie became the object of poetic adoration. One day, half doubtful as to her right to these effusions, she questioned her friend.

"Ye dinna think much o' Walter's sangs, Maggie?"

"Nae, and ye need na' either, Nannie," interposed old Jeannie; "nae gude can come o' them. I wad na' gie much anent a yonker that maun be makin' sangs when he sud be turnin' the plough. Maggie and I are ganging north, Nannie, and I read ye beware o' Walter Boyd. We are ganging hame to where Maggie used to live; she's pinin' for the heather, puir chiel;—she's been aillin' iver since she left it. I read ye dinna heed the sangs o' Walter Boyd—they dinna come frae his heart."

Margaret's voice was exceedingly sweet as she checked the good woman and replied to her friend.

"He will lo' ye, Nannie, gin ye dinna lo' him too much; he will understand ye, Nannie, then. Ye must nae be jealous nor over-fond, dear;—but ye maun expect he will write verses to ithers. *Gin ye can bear this, Nannie*, he will always lo' ye as he does now. These will be but fancies; the poet maun hae them always; they mean naething—and I ken Walter Boyd will never lo' again."

Margaret's face was very pale as she uttered this, and Nannie looked as if she did not quite comprehend her.

Old Jeannie carried her child home, but it was only that the heather might bloom upon her grave. When the sweet lips of Margaret had ceased to move, Jeannie undid the hand which seemed clasped over something beneath her bosom: two papers fell therefrom, and one was the "intercepted letter." Adjusting her spectacles, she read the lines, which would seem never to have been artistically finished—

"Turn not thy eyes on me, lassie,
Turn away that winsome smile;
In thy glance is mischief, lassie,
And that lip, it may beguile.
Deluding is thy tone, lassie,
Too enchanting is thine air—
Though it be disloyal, lassie,
I must own thee wondrous fair.

"Love is lurking with thee, Nannie,
Nestling in that lip of thine;
Might I scorn his power, Nannie,
Lighter were this heart of mine.
Another on thy smile, Nannie,
Will enraptured learn to wait;
Let me but learn the while, Nannie,
Love is not the pet of fate."

Old Jeannie wiped her spectacles, muttering to herself, "I kenned Walter Boyd was at the bottom o' a' this;" and the confirmation of her surmise brought a dim comfort to her decaying faculties.