

OLD LOVE LETTERS.

BY J. BRACKENRIDGE ELLIS.

The letter slipped from her hand and lay upon the carpet at her feet. The scented sheet of paper, rosy from the fire, seemed to blush with the message it had brought. For six months she had been expecting Edgar Duval to ask for her hand, but his letter found her more undecided, more ill at ease than she could have imagined. Yet, she liked him. Five years he had been her friend. Ever since their mock-marriage at the country schoolhouse he had been resolved to make her his bride in reality. He was bright and attractive; their tastes were congenial. She realized that their marriage would mean much for her and for her parents. And yet—

And yet, that morning at church, the sight of a face dispelled all the glamour she had sought to cast over her friendship for Edgar Duval. The face was not so handsome as that of the man whose letter lay at her feet; it was not so distinguished; but it was the face of the man she had loved. How long had that been? Or had she really ceased to love? She stared into the hollow among the glowing coals and tried to see the picture of herself as she was six years ago.

Six years ago the thought of teaching school had not occurred to her. Why should it? She was graduated, and Morton Summers was her accepted lover. Every one knew they expected to marry when he should have won his way for them in the West. It seemed hard to the lovers that they must be separated a year while his uncle in Colorado "teated" the young fellow to find if he was made of the right stuff. But Morton left her in her Missouri home, full of hope, and conscious of the power to wait. Letters were exchanged regularly at first, but after awhile they were not sent so often. Her heart was as true and as loving, but family cares took much of her time, and fancying he delayed his answers, she delayed her responses even longer, partly as a punishment, partly thinking it would spur him to greater regularity.



To announce the engagement

He had not been in her thoughts that morning as she sat in the choir, waiting for the first song to be announced. Indeed, she was thinking of Edgar Duval who sat behind her behind her among the tenors. She was tracing the history of their acquaintance and friendship from the night she leaned upon his arm under the bride's veil in the mock-marriage. When she became sure of Morton's infidelity, she found Duval's companionship a relief. As the years passed, she began to wonder if she could care for him in the way he evidently cared for her. Sometimes she told herself the image of her faithless lover was fading from her heart.

It was so on that Sunday morning. She was about to convince herself that she really loved the tenor with the rich full voice, the changing smile, the distinguished lift of the head, the man who had been true to her while she had offered him no hope of reward. And wondering if this were so, and half-believing he might bring her happiness, her eyes wandered to an obscure corner of the little church, and there found the face of her girlhood's romance. Her heart stood still, and she grew cold from head to foot, but her face did not alter. She turned her eyes upon the open song book, but during the service, though she looked intently at the ———, she saw nothing but the pale face of Morton Summers. How much older it appeared and yet so like the old face, her heart ached miserably.

When the congregation was dismissed, he waited to greet her. His manner was very quiet; his hand scarce touched hers. In answer to her conventional question he said he would be in town only till the morrow.

She did not ask him to call, but swept past, her hand upon Edgar Duval's arm. And now in the afternoon this letter had come from the morning's escort, asking her to be his wife. She wished it had not come today. Presently she picked it up, and read it slowly through. Again it fell from her listless fingers. Suddenly she shuddered and stirred the fire. If it had come yesterday!

At last she rose hurriedly and go-

ing into the next room, returned with a small shabby box. She unlocked it, and drew forth a bundle of old letters and a few queer objects, whose value lay only in the associations of past thoughts and feelings. She untied the faded ribbon and began to read the letters. They were all from Morton Summers.

"No matter how long it may be," they ran, "No matter what happens, I will always trust you, you will always trust me." Perhaps all lovers have written so. The tears presently hid the words. "Through the blur, tender epistles shone. 'Darling Sweetheart' she never tired of gazing upon them. It was as if his voice still called her thus. She dashed away the tears, and caught sight of the letter upon the floor. She held it up in one hand and seemed to weigh it against the bundle of old love letters. How much older they were than the love of which they spoke!

"Which shall I destroy?" she asked aloud, stepping to the fire. "I cannot keep both. Poor Edgar, he loves me so faithfully! Poor Morton—he loved me once! And I—and I? God help me! I love him still! I know—I know," she faltered, the tears again rushing to her eyes, "that I shall love him always."

She cast Edgar Duval's passionate appeal into the flames and sinking back into the chair, buried her face among the letters of long ago, kissing them wildly. She had made her choice; the choice of a lonely life, a life of privations and toil, but a life which could be lived true to its ideals and its girlhood's faith.

"Yes, she is at home," said the maid to the tall, pale stranger. "She is in the parlor. Will you walk in?"

She had not heard the doorbell, nor did she notice the opening of the door. She did not live in the room, just then, but in a fairy world with golden splashes from the sun, and fragrant perfumes now vanished many years, and a gentle voice—yes, she lived with it, and with eloquent eyes, and a clinging hand. Her mind was so far away she could not hear the footsteps drawing near, nor see the startled gaze riveted upon the old letters heaped in her lap.

A sudden exclamation of surprise and pain brought her, with a violent shock, back into the present.

Thinking Edgar Duval stood near at hand, she glanced down with dismay at the love letters, while her cheeks, still damp from tears, grew crimson. Then seeing it was Morton her confusion and distress sought relief in anger. She hurriedly dashed the letters into the box, crying out her—

"You have no right here!" "These give me the right," cried Morton, his eyes burning as he tore the letters from her grasp, and held them up. "They speak for me to-day as they spoke six years ago. Hear them, Darling, every word is true. You loved them once—you love them now, I saw it in your eyes as I entered."

She turned upon him, her eyes blazing.

"You come to me after all these years—after all these years—you come and speak of love after—"

Her voice faltered. There was something in his gaze which slew her anger and made her grow afraid from the sudden hope too wonderful for belief.

"Dear sweetheart—the only one I ever loved"—he faltered, extending his arms. "There has been a terrible mistake. I came here to-day, to see you once again as a friend of the past, thinking you were Edgar Duval's wife. But when I saw you bending over those letters I knew, somehow, it was not as I had thought."

"How could you have thought me his wife?" And yet, perhaps if he had not come, she might indeed have been what he had believed!

"I read of your marriage in the schoolhouse, five years ago—and then I thought I understood why your letters had grown far apart. I couldn't believe it, darling. Oh, I couldn't think it true! I wrote to a friend, and he told me you had married Duval. He thought it a joke, no doubt."

She understood at last and paled, then crimsoned. Passionate joy beat in her bosom. To still her emotion, her voice sounded dreamy, far away.

"Yes, we gave an entertainment. There was an old-fashioned spelling-match and a mock marriage. I remember the county paper wrote up the ceremony as if it were a real wedding. That was for fun, of course. I remember how we laughed over it. And you saw that—and you believed it true! Oh, Morton, while we were laughing at the account, you were—you were—"

She could say no more; sudden sobs interrupted her plying voice. But he did not need her plying now. He felt, as her head sank upon his breast, and the love of youth spoke in eloquent silence, fresh and warm and true from lips to lips, that he needed nothing in all the world but what had been his long ago.

"And you must leave in the morning?" she asked, after a long silence. "Yes, but before we lose any time let me go to the telephone. I will call up the paper that printed that story five years ago, and let them now announce the engagement of two happy lovers."

He looked into her smiling yet tearful eyes, and laughed aloud. The light, laughed, too, as it gleamed upon some old letters which lay scattered at their feet. An in the hollow among the burning coals, a crinkling, blackened paper seemed to crouch and cower, as if to hide from sight. Above it the grate fire snapped merrily. Thus from above the ashes of a lost hope how often happiness casts its radiant light.

MANUFACTURING WITCH HAZEL.

How the Brush is Collected and Distilled in Connecticut.

The witch hazel industry dates back about thirty-five years. There are many kinds of witch hazel, for this product is rather remarkable in that it has no standard except that given by its manufacturer. It is not subject to a chemical test, and the purchaser must depend for its worth upon the good faith of its distiller. In making alcohol, for instance, a distiller obtains but four gallons of proof spirit from a bushel of corn, though he keeps his still working until the crack of doom.

In the distillation of witch hazel, however, a distiller can take out twenty gallons, forty, or even twenty barrels from a ton of brush at one operation. He can keep on running the extract until he gets tired; it is all witch hazel, but, as a matter of fact, the first gallon is the strongest, the second is a little weaker, and so on until the odor in runnings is but temporary, and there is nothing left.

Others there are who, instead of using the green twigs, distill from the dried bark, because it is so much cheaper and can be made any time in the year. But the product so obtained has not the fine, pungent odor obtained from young twigs. Some also use a larger proportion of water than is called for by the amount of the material, and the resulting product is an aqueous distillation with but slight traces of witch hazel's characteristic odor.

The witch hazel season does not open until after all their crops have been harvested. There is at such a time little for the farmers to do, and if it were not for this industry it might go hard with some of them. They simply hitch their horses to a big team and, armed with small hatchets, drive out into the woods. The witch hazel grows in hilly and rough places and it is usually difficult to get to the spot with a heavy team.

On arriving at a good growth of the bush all hands set to work cutting the brush off near the roots and piling it into the teams. There is no mistaking it, for it has a characteristic look and pungent but pleasant odor. When a load is obtained it is driven to the nearest cutting station, where it is cut, then macerated and put into the still. The price paid for the brush is about \$4.50 to \$5 a ton.

Fashions on the Upper Nile.

Recently the British public received some fashion hints from the upper Nile, a returned explorer reporting as follows: "The largest tribe in extent of distribution is the Acholi, which covers the greater part of the country between the Latuka mountains and the Victoria Nile. They are a fine, tall, well-built race, and they live in open villages as a rule; their arms are chiefly spears, and they spend a good deal of their time in the pursuit of game; they practically wear no clothes at all, except a small piece of skin as an apron or hung over one shoulder. Married women wear sometimes a small apron made of beads. The men and women also are fond of wearing a crystal or glass spike, about three inches long, in the lower lip. Young men are generally very smartly turned out, wearing brightly polished metal rings on their arms and legs, also a peculiar little conical cap made of felted human hair, ornamented with beads of glass or ivory. They keep their weapons in good order and always keep themselves very clean and well oiled."

"A peculiar custom in their villages is the building of a common nursery, into which all the small children are stuffed at night, the small door being closed with a wisp of hay or piece of barkwork. These nurseries are usually raised above the ground and are reached with a ladder, so as to be beyond the reach of hyenas. A similar arrangement in a somewhat larger scale is made for the young unmarried girls. The huts are beehive shaped, generally very neatly and carefully built."

"A wilder and less organized tribe than the Acholi are the Lango. The young warriors wear very handsome headdresses made of cock's feathers, which resemble a guardman's bearskin at a short distance. Another peculiar habit of the Lango is to pierce the tongue and hang a little piece of brass chain to the tip. This is the highest effort of fashion."

Preserving Tobacco Plants.

Visitors to the tobacco country were often surprised to note in the fields that the long stems of the seed plants—those whose heads had not been lopped off earlier in the season to allow the full strength of the plant to go into the leaves—were covered with caps which on examination proved to be ordinary Manila paper bags tied tightly around the scarlet and white flowers of the plant, says the New York World.

Inquiry disclosed that the practice has grown out of experiments lately conducted in the region by Prof. A. D. Shamel of the Bureau of Plant Industry of the United States Department of Agriculture. The farmer has determined what type of tobacco plant is fittest to survive, and he is helping along the survival. Enclosed in a paper sack each flower is obliged to reproduce itself without interference from outside. The paper bags are used, of course, to secure self-fertilization instead of cross-fertilization.

Time of a Wink.

By pasting a bit of paper upon the eyelid a photographic record has been made of the duration of time required in winking the eye. It has been found that a wink requires one-third of a second.—Exchange.

The Cakewalk Dance.

Composed by Rayne Sullivan