

must, at any price, and promptly, restore the brilliancy of the gilded and proud escutcheon of the noble Counts of Cumbres Azules, considerably deteriorated by the luxurious and extravagant tastes of mother and son. The sacrifice was then inevitable, however painful it might be.

Marie arrived, and it cost the egotistical young man no small humiliation to confess he had been entirely mistaken in his preconceived ideas of his cousin, for like all vain people he was exceedingly tenacious of his opinions. Whether he liked it or not, he had to admit, and that without reserve, that Marie was not the kind of girl he had imagined her to be. She was very beautiful, tall, slight, witty, courteous and affable to all. She dressed with exquisite taste, and yet with great simplicity. She spoke and wrote three or four languages fluently; played the piano and sang like an angel. Of literature and art, as well as the fundamental principles of certain sciences, she had a varied and wide knowledge. In fine, she was a highly cultured girl, with a calm, clear outlook on life.

And yet, strange to say, this young girl, gifted with so many exceptionally brilliant qualities, was a devotee!—a fanatic in the extreme. She went to church and received the Sacraments frequently, firmly believed all the teachings of the Catholic faith—without even excluding its most vulgar tenets, as Gustave designated them. Such beliefs were for the ignorant or people of diseased minds. How was this to be explained? Gustave gave up trying to solve the problem.

On various occasions he tried to fathom the young girl's mind with respect to questions on religious subjects, provoking her to discussions in which he always came out only second best. It could not happen otherwise, for this vain young infidel had gained all his knowledge from impious books, and was absolutely ignorant of the fundamental truths of religion. His cousin, on the contrary, was thoroughly well instructed in the dogmas of Catholic teaching, and was able to support her arguments with solid, clear reasoning which reduced Gustave's assertions to dust. But, though disconcerted, he would never yield, and generally backed out of the disputes ignominiously, not, however, without discharging a few blank cartridges while retreating.

In discussions on ordinary subjects Marie willingly yielded to her cousin, but when there was a question of religion she was implacable. She knew her adversary thoroughly now and gave him no quarter. Yet so great was his vanity, coupled with blind ignorance, that he could not see when he was beaten. Marie's gifts, moral, physical, and intellectual, were as nothing to this cultured young genius—but still they were not quite to be ignored. Perhaps he would be able to endure her little peculiarities, it might be worth the trouble. How audacious she was to argue with him, and about such vulgar trifles! However, time was passing all too swiftly and he had not much more to lose.

And so our hero at last decided to honor his cousin by asking her to be his wife. He railed at fate for having treated him so badly, but what was he to do? He felt quite confident that his proposal would be accepted. How astonished Marie would be! He could almost picture her surprise when he, the spoiled favorite of society, the elegant, learned young Count, would ask her to marry him!

At last the moment arrived. Marie listened to Gustave's proposal smilingly, without evincing the least surprise. He insisted on an immediate answer, but the young girl, still smiling, only made a jest of his proposal. Were they not cousins? How could she think that Gustave was formally making her an offer of his hand? Gustave was pleased and flattered. It was just as he had conjectured: his cousin had never even dreamt that he could think of marrying her, a simple, shy girl. It spoke much for her humility and modesty, and her appreciation of his merits gave him entire satisfaction. But as Marie still continued in the same incredulous state of mind he resolved to bring matters to a conclusion.

One evening he asked his mother to accompany him to his cousin's in order to make a formal proposal to her parents for her hand. Dressed in the extreme of fashion, and smiling with satisfaction, the heir of Cumbres Azules arrived at his cousin's house. What a surprise the dear little girl was about to experience!

'Are my aunt and uncle at home?'

'The master is out, sir, but the mistress and the young lady are in the blue boudoir. Shall I announce you, sir?' asked the man, bowing respectfully.

'Thanks, no, Luis; you know how much at home we are in this house,' said the Countess, as she and her son passed through the hall and went upstairs. Gustave walked beside his mother with that erect, self-confident, smiling air of a man sure of success and conquest.

As they entered the outer drawing-room, from which the blue boudoir was curtained off by a heavy portiere, they distinctly heard Marie's mother saying the following words to her daughter: 'You see, dearest, you must give him a decided answer. The Marquis de Herminia is an excellent Catholic and a perfect gentleman—and, to be frank with you, neither your father nor I object in the least to calling him our son-in-law.'

Gustave and his mother exchanged frightened glances when they heard those words. They hardly dared breathe, and fortunately their footsteps were unheard on the rich, thick carpet. The voice continued:

'Well, Marie, what do you think of this proposal?'

'I—the truth is, dear mamma, I have no objection; that is, if you and papa think well of it,' Marie answered in a sweet, trembling voice.

'Thanks be to God, my daughter!' exclaimed her mother. 'What a weight your words have taken from my heart! My father and I feared you loved your cousin.'

'For heaven's sake, mamma! I love a man of that type! No, not even if I were mad!'

'But, dear, you would not give him a decided answer when he proposed to you.'

'So he says, mamma, because his consummate vanity will not allow him to see that I took it all as a jest. Do you think that I would for a moment dream of giving a serious answer to one who, like him, considers marriage a miserable speculation, a matter of business? Why, he thinks he is conferring on me an extraordinary favor in asking me to marry him! He looks on me as a silly fanatic, while he believes himself to be a very enlightened person indeed. But, dearest mamma, he is nothing of the kind. Like all men of his stamp, he is really ignorant and vulgar—yes, vulgar—in his affectation of elegance, in his superficial knowledge, and even in his impiety. When I met him first he wished to impress on me that he was an infidel to be feared—but I soon found him to be completely harmless—for no one with even a very limited understanding and only a little education could fail to see through his false reasoning and ignorance of the topics on which he spoke with so much confidence. His is just the style for a club orator or gratuitous contributor to an irreligious periodical.'

The concentrated pride and indignation of seven generations of Cumbres Azules revolted in Gustave's breast when these words reached his ears. They were the only true ones he had ever heard respecting his personal character during his life. The blood rushed to his face, his head reeled, and so great was the shock his self-conceit received that he would have fallen had he not clutched at the back of a chair for support.

At that moment the servant man appeared at the door and said: 'Why has not your ladyship passed in? The ladies are in the blue room. But whatever is the matter with the Count?' he added, drawing nearer. 'Is he ill?'

On hearing the man's exclamation, Marie and her mother exchanged glances which plainly said: 'The Countess and Gustave have heard all!' and then hurried out to meet their visitors.

'It is nothing, absolutely nothing, he is only a little nervous,' explained the Countess, endeavoring, like Gustave, to smile.

Marie hastened to the outer door of the room, and, calling to her maid, said in a voice of delicately veiled sarcasm:

'Juana, make a good strong restorative and bring it up quickly; the Count Gustave does not feel very well.—*Donaht's Magazine.*

A MATTER OF NATIONALITY

Lafe and I began persecuting the Norwegian almost as soon as he settled on the opposite side of the creek—only we did not call it persecution in those days.

Nearly all children are provincials at heart, and neither of us was lacking in our fair share of prejudice. When distant observation showed us that the newcomer was unmistakably Scandinavian in type, we turned to look into each other's face in disgust too deep for words.

'Well—if that isn't the limit!' Lafe burst forth at last. 'If we had to have neighbors, we needn't have had a foreigner. If father just had taken up that bottom the way he meant to—'

A brilliant idea broke off the speech, and he clapped his hand suddenly upon his horse's neck. 'I tell you, Jim, let's run him off!'

I was Lafe's guest that summer, and a year or two his junior, and I was aching for excitement.

'Let's! I agreed without a second thought, and we rode slowly home, planning our ways and means.

Naturally we said nothing to the rest of the household regarding our intentions. Mr. Bradley, Lafe's father, seemed, after a single outburst of disappointment, to forget the very existence of the newcomer; and as for Mrs. Bradley, a woman who objected even to such innocent amusements as the riding of calves and the roping of chickens, could not possibly have sound views on the subject of neighbors. Indeed, we had a shrewd suspicion that I and not the Norwegian would be banished if our project came to light.

We needed no outside help, however, in devising means of annoyance. The Norwegian's gates came open and the wires came down from his fences with surprising frequency; the water at the head of his ditch was continually choked by driftwood, and his cows, turned out to graze in the morning, by night were miles away.

For a long time the victim of these outrages seemed to lay them entirely to natural causes. Then he must have observed that the days we rode through the hills surrounding his claim were always the days of accident, for he accused us heatedly once or twice of interference with his cattle, and the interference continuing, complained to Mr.