AN ASTRAL ROMANCE.

THEY were, I think, the happiest couple it was ever my good fortune to meet — Margaret and Paul Fischer. They were so completely absorbed in each other that they seldom took the trouble to become acquainted with strangers, not feeling the need of companionship. But, as good luck would have it, they did allow me to come to see them, and when I had known them long enough to dare to speak on personal matters, I remarked upon the perfect harmony that existed between them. Then Margaret told me their story; and this is the romance as she gave it to me:

"I will tell you my side of the story and then Paul can tell you his.

"As you may have discovered, I have dabbled somewhat in occult matters. I have always been a natural musician and I play without difficulty any piece of music which I may pick up, although I have never taken a lesson or 'practiced' one hour during my lifetime. When I was a child I had only one playmate—he was a little older than myself—and I was satisfied if I could hide away somewhere and wait for him to come. The peculiar part of the matter was that no one else was able to see him, and as for myself, I never knew where he came from, nor did I ever see him until I looked up suddenly and found him beside me. Another peculiar fact was that he always carried an odd instrument similar to a harp, and we would sit side by side for hours, he playing, I listening entranced, until suddenly the music would cease and I would look up to find the player gone. Then I would go into the house and play the music over again on the piano. This went on for years and people considered me 'queer,' if not quite crazy.

"I never could talk with my playmate because he used a language which I could not understand. As I grew older I drifted away from him. Other affairs filled my mind and it was but seldom I would have a vision in which the same form always appeared, but seeming to grow older even as I was.

"I began to study occult sciences when I was about 18 years old. I attended spiritualists' seances and finally took up the study of theosophy. Never, however, had I received a so-called 'test,' and any deductions I made were of necessity founded upon the experiences of other people.

"One night, after I had attended a meeting, I sat down by the table at home and, idly picking up a pencil, started to draw a portrait—I who had never in my life been able to draw a straight line. The picture resulting represented a young man with dark eyes and hair combed straight back from a wide, high forhead. The features were delicately molded and the mouth was partially covered by a mustache." (Here she looked admiringly at her husband and then resumed the thread of her narrative). "He seemed 23 or 24 years old, and was decidedly handsome. Underneath the portrait I was impressed to write: 'This is Paul ——. You will soon see his face.' I was told soon afterward that

WAS INTRODUCED.

Paul Fischer was a spirit and was the same little boy with whom I had been acquainted in my childhood. I was told also that he was born in Alsace-Lorraine and had never been outside of his own country. I treasured the portrait I had obtained, it had a great fascination for me, but so much occupied my thoughts that I had no time, as a rule, to think much of the original. Six years passed by and I found it necessary to go to a strange city. I reached the town early in the morning and, hunting up a boarding house at once, I settled down for a good rest before commencing the business which had brought me to the place.

"As I was going to dinner that night I came face to face, in the hall, with Paul. I started and so did he. Then with, 'I beg your pardon madam,' he stood aside to allow me to pass. I was too much disturbed to be able to eat much, and I felt his eyes were watching me all the time, so I soon left the table.

"In the evening Mrs. Porter, the woman at whose house I was staying, knocked at my door and asked me to come into the parlor. I hesitated, but went and was introduced to 'Paul Fischer'—the man of my dreams—the man of the portrait. I recognized the face, the voice, the way in which the hair was arranged, in fact, every detail corresponded with my preconceived ideas of how he would look. But my head was in a whirl. My Paul Fischer was supposed to be a spirit, but this Paul Fischer was decidedly material.

"It was just one week before the problem was solved. I do not intend to solve it for you—Paul will do that. To make matters short, however, I will say that I found that he was my Paul Fischer. It was just one month from the time I met him until we were married. On our wedding day Paul brought out a portfolio and asked me to look through it and tell him what I thought of his drawings. The first sheet I picked up showed a portrait of myself. I was represented sitting at a table sketching a man's head, and the date was the same on which I had done my first and only drawing six years before. But Paul must tell you the rest."

"When I was a little boy, in the old country (I was born in Alsace-Lorraine), people regarded me as being 'very peculiar.' I would wander off by myself for hours where no one could find me, carrying my harp along, and when I returned I would have a picture in my mind of a little, brown-eyed, brown-haired girl, who listened to my music and reproduced everything which I played upon an instrument different from any I had ever seen. I know now it was a piano, but then I had no knowledge concerning it. Sometimes I would have long fainting spells, and while I was unconscious would babble away about the little maid who could not understand what I said, because she talked a different language from my own. Finally it began to be whispered about that I was possessed of a devil and my father was forced to send me away in order to protect me.

"I came to America when I was 18 years old, and, going to the far west, I amassed quite a fortune. I did not see the friend of my childhood so frequently as I grew older, because increasing wealth brought increasing cares and I had no time to make the customary visits. Still, once in awhile the old 'fainting spells' would come over me and when I returned to consciousness I would bring with me the memory of a smiling face and gentle, brown eyes—a face that seemed to grow older with my increasing years.

"One night I sat in my room late. As I supposed I fell asleep, but when I awakened I found before me the portrait of a young woman who was sitting beside a table sketching, and the portrait she had finished was of myself. I put the picture carefully away, taking it out at long intervals in order to familiarize myself with the features, for I felt that some time, somewhere, I should meet her.

"One night about six months ago I was late in leaving the office and upon reaching my home I hurried down to the dining room. In the hall I came face to face with Margaret, the friend of my childhood, the sweetheart of my dreams. I could not eat—I was too excited—and I begged Mrs. Porter to call the newcomer into the parlor to introduce us. The longer I talked with her the more convinced I became that she was the one woman in all the world whom I could love. I was curious to find out whether she had any conception of the peculiar circumstances which drew me to her and I questioned her adroitly in regard to the matter.

"Then, she, who had puzzled her dear little head in vain over the matter, told me all her experience and when we compared notes we decided that, as heaven had meant us for each other from the beginning, there was no reason why we should wait for our happiness. 'So we were married and lived happily ever after,' as they say in the fairy stories.

"Now, I myself do not pretend to give an explanation of this, but Margaret, who has studied these matters closely, says that my astral body must have detached itself from the material form and sped across the sea to join her, drawn by some inexplicable, invisible attraction. That may be the case. If Margaret says so I am willing to accept it as truth. But this I do know. She is a dear, sweet little woman, the sweetheart of my waking and sleeping hours, my alter ego, the center of my universe."

"WHERE WOULD YOU BEGIN?"

Forty-two persons who had resided for three months or more in college settlements, thus coming into contact with the very poor, were recently asked: "What reforms or changes have you come to feel are most urgent and most practicable, and where would you begin?" In the Publications of the Church Social Union the replies are summarized as follows:

First and universal comes improved housing of the poor; in quick succession follow the organization of labor, the eight-hour movement, playgrounds and parks, improved schools and school laws, municipal reform, persuasion of the poor to have smaller families, trade schools, public baths, the introduction of poetry into the lives of the poor, income tax, coffee houses, cooking and sewing obligatory in public schools, regeneration of the upper classes, consumers' leagues, the inculcation of thrift, free silver, municipalization of railways and lighting, temperance reform, sweat-shop regulations and direct religious work.

Some of the suggestions are rather general, and some are a trifle absurd; yet the list has its uses. It proves, for instance, that intelligent and sincere people may honestly differ concerning the solution of the problem of poverty, and the disagreement only brings out the truth that there is a diversity of needs, as well as "diversity of gifts," and that any and every possession or accomplishment may be so used as to brighten the lives of the unfortunates. Quite as important as the question, "Where would you begin?" is another inquiry which conscience must force upon every thoughtful citizen: "Will you begin somewhere?"

Read the Advertisements.

You will enjoy this publication much better if you will get into the habit of reading the advertisements; they will afford a most interesting study and will put you in the way of getting some excellent bargains. Our advertisers are reliable, they send what they advertise.

The Minister's Bad Pun.

"Have you cut off that villain's head yet?" asked his majesty, referring to an obnoxious person who cuts no particular figure.

"We have not," admitted the prime minister. "His attorney has shown us that all his property is in his wife's name."

"What the dickens has that got to do with it?"

"Why, it makes him execution proof, don't you see?"

A Natural Error.

Over the telephone—"Is this Bonds & Co.?

"Yes. What its it?"

"We have found that cipher telegram of yours that got lost. This is the telegraph office talking."

"Well, what became of it?"

"A new boy took it over to the office of the Decade Magazine. When the tracer found it there they had it in type. Thought it was a new poem. Had the toughest kind of work getting them to give it up."

The Count Was Dreaming.

Midnight.

The Countess Gesundheimer, nee Perkingham, was listening intently.

The count was talking in his sleep.

True, when she had exchanged her millions for his title she had waived all thoughts of his past, but with a woman's natural curiosity she wished to know for the sake of knowing.

Breathlessly she hearkened. From the finely chiseled lips of her aristocratic spouse came the words:

"Collar puttons, two for five. Nice ivorine collar buttons, two for five."

Entirely Adequate.

New Reporter, to managing editor of Philadelphia evening paper—Shall I go out and get some news?

Managing Editor—There's no necessity for that, sir, the New York morning papers are all here.—Texas Siftings.

The Flag Will Be Hoisted.

Secretary Carlisle has directed that hereafter the United States flag shall be hoisted on all public buildings under the control of the treasury department during the hours of business, unless stormy weather prevents its display. The revenue flag is also to be displayed over custom houses.

His Terrible Fate.

A Scotch minister, a few Sundays ago, held out as a warning to his congregation the case of an Aberdeen man who rode on his bicycle on Sundays with the result that "he broke a blood vessel on Monday, went to hell on Wednesday, and was buried on Saturday."

A Precocious Youngster.

"Charles, you must do what I tell you. When I was a little child like you I was always good and obedient."

"I'm glad to know that, mamma, and you may be sure that I'll say the same to my children when I have any."

If some men were to lose their reputation they would be lucky.

Man proposes, woman imposes and the divorce court exposes.

The majority of rising young men of today run elevators.

A gift with a string to it is a great drawback to charity.

Genealogy.

Alexandre Dumas, the great French author, was a quadroon, and showed his African parentage in his woolly hair, his dark skin, his thick lips and his prodigious bodily strength. But it is needless to say that many people looked askance at him on account of it.

"Was not your father, sir, a mulatto?" a man asked him once.

"Certainly," said Dumas. "My father was a mulatto, my grandfather was a full-blooded negro, and my great-grandfather was a monkey!"

"What!"

"Yes; my genealogy begins where yours leaves off!"—Youth's Companion.

No Cruelty.

Traveler—Yes, I was captured by the savages and sentenced to marry a squaw.

Hostess—Horrible.

Traveler—Yes; but they had some mercy. They did not insist on a fashionable wedding.—N. Y. Weekly.

Drawing the Line.

Mrs. De Fashion—My dear, I have picked out a husband for you.

Miss De Fashion—Very well; but I want to say right now, mother, that when it comes to buying the wedding dress, I am going to select the material myself, so there.

Not Consulted in the Matter.

"Do you let your wife have her own way in everything, Mr. Henpect?"

"I suppose I would if she asked me, but she never asks me."

The man who itches for fame is usually kept scratching.

W. N. U. OMAHA. No. 37.—1897.

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