

Charles Hutton IN LOVE WITH AN AUTOMATON.



EVERYBODY has heard of that famous automaton, the "Chess-player of Kempelin," by means of which the little Russian officer escaped from his enemies, and beat them at chess at the same time. At any rate, Mr. Oliver Conway had heard of it; and, naturally thinking that what a benighted foreigner could do, a free and enlightened American citizen ought to do as well or better, he set to work on a chess-playing automaton that was intended to portray "the father of his country" en-

grossed in the noble game.

After two years of patient experimenting, the inventor's hopes were crowned with complete success.

At once the wonderful automaton, George Washington, began his travels, appearing successively in all the great cities of the Union, and receiving the most patriotic welcome everywhere.

Indeed, George, as his friends affectionately termed him, performed his part in a way to do honor to his name; winning, as a rule, and losing, when he did lose, with true Washingtonian dignity.

Of course the first question with every visitor was, who furnished George with the needful brains? All who chose were invited to examine the figure and the chest of drawers upon which it leaned; but the peering, poking, thumping that ensued, led to no discovery.

On a certain December morning, the *Gazette, Commercial Inquirer, Times, etc.*, announced to the dwellers of a certain Western city that the well-known chess-playing automaton, George Washington, was now on exhibition at No. 54 Race Street. Doors open from one to five, P.M. Admission 10 cents. Games 25 cents.

Everybody who took an interest in chess resolved to go to No. 54, and quite a number went. Among others, went Mr. Francis Pinkerton, an ardent lover of the game.

The exhibition proved entirely satisfactory—the automatic George winning all the games but one, and so stoutly contesting that one, that the victor, young Pinkerton, resolved to come next day. In point of fact, he not only came next day, but every day for two weeks.

The best time for play, he soon discovered, was the first hour of the exhibition, when, as a rule, but few persons were present. Indeed, he was often left entirely alone with the automaton; when even the exhibitor, after winding up the machine, withdrew to chat with the doorkeeper in the outer passage.

By degrees, what may be called a chess-friendship grew up between the man and the machine. The two were very equally matched, and the games were often warmly contested.

After an unlucky move, or the defeat of some deep-laid scheme, Pinkerton would look up with an involuntary grimace, almost expecting to see the rather blank features of his opponent expand into a smile of triumph. But the Father of his Country stared solemnly at the wall opposite, and gave no sign.

But one day, when a severe snowstorm kept other visitors away, and Mr. Conway had gone out in quest of a cigar, Pinkerton and his silent opponent were engaged in a game that had been exciting from the start, and at last reached one of those dead-locks in which a move may mean victory or defeat.

It was Pinkerton's move; and, after a deliberate survey of the field, he made a move which he regarded as decisive, but which, by an unparalleled oversight, left his queen exposed. His chagrin at this puerile blunder may be imagined. He looked up, confident that even an automaton must be hugely amused; and on meeting the usual blankly benevolent stare, he was provoked into the indecorum of shaking his fist at the unresponsive image.

George did not relax a jot of his wonted dignity. There was no twinkle of the eye, no twitching of the lips, to indicate merriment; yet out of the broad chest came a ripple of half-suppressed, musical laughter, as of a person who had forgotten the impropriety of mirth till too late to control it.

Frank Pinkerton sprang to his feet in utter amazement. It was a young girl's laugh; there was no mistaking the irrepressible, fun-loving intonation. And when the laughter had ceased, as it quickly did, it was a young girl's voice, of almost childlike sweetness, that begun, in rueful, pleading tones:

"Oh, what have I done! Do, pray, promise me, sir, you will not tell. We shall be ruined, else. I forgot where I was; you looked so droll, I could not help laughing. But please promise not to tell any one, not even my father. Quick! I hear him coming now."

"I promise with all my heart, but——"

The door opened to Mr. Conway and a visitor before the young man could finish his sentence; and, it being two o'clock, he was obliged to go at once to the bank, in which he held the position of assistant cashier.

For a whole week thereafter, though he went every day to the Race Street rooms, Pinkerton was never left alone with the automaton for an instant. There was, therefore, no opportunity to open communication with the mysterious tenant of the figure.

Meanwhile, his imagination was by no means idle. What young man with an unfettered heart in his bosom could have sat opposite an invisible female, known to possess a sweet voice, a musical laugh and a good brain for chess, and yet felt no romantic stirrings in his blood?

That cunning elf, imagination, was ready with charming forms and faces to suit the dulcet tones of the voice. Ladies in Venetian masks or black dominos have always exerted a remarkable fascination over mankind, as witness the novels of all nations. But a sweet-voiced lady inspiring an automaton—what a field for romantic speculation!

In short, thanks to a lively fancy, within a week our hero found himself positively in love with a lady he had never seen.

He fell into the habit of strolling down Race Street about the time the day's performance came to an end, scrutinizing with flattering attention all the women who issued from that particular block.

But the whole upper part of the building seemed given over to various sorts of feminine industry, so that women, buyers and workers alike, were continually coming and going. Amid such a crowd, it was not easy to recognize a lady one had never seen.

Pinkerton hazarded several guesses, however. He was particularly struck, for example, with a daintily poised figure, distractingly muffled up in wraps, whom he never saw leave the building, but twice saw enter it shortly before 1 P.M.

He could not, of course, rush across the street and follow the figure up-stairs, as we shall do, to the second floor, and into a room two doors beyond that in which the automaton was exhibited.

Mr. Conway stood in the middle of this room, and greeted the figure's entrance with:



SHE SANG TO ME.

BY F. E. WEATHERLY.

SHE sang to me, she sang to me,
From her trellised window-pane;
Over the cornlands by the sea,
Till my glad heart sang again.
She sang to me, she sang to me,
And I ran with willing feet,
Over the cornlands by the sea,
To my love, my sweet.

She sang to me, she sang to me,
We heard the sea's faint chime,
Under the cliffs by the dusking sea,
In the tender twilight time.
She sang to me, she sang to me,
In mine her dear hands lay;
And naught to me were land and sea,
My love was mine for aye.

She was too fair for earth and me,
She went in her fresh, sweet bloom;
There is no rest on land or sea,
But only near her tomb.
She sings among the angels now,
She leans from heaven above;
She sings to me, she sings to me,
And the sound is peace and love.

Terry Macquinn

"You are a little late to-day, Ollie."

"Yes; I waited to avoid some one who was watching me, I thought."

And the young lady bit her lip to keep back the blush and half-smile that would come.

"That's right, my dear; be very cautious. A discovery

would ruin us. But it is time you were dressing. I will get the machine ready directly."

Mr. Conway bustled away through an intervening room, leaving his daughter to make certain needful changes in her apparel.

When she presently appeared before her father, who,

after carefully locking the outer door, had mysteriously cleft the imposing frame of George Washington in twain, Ollie was arranged to suit the economic requirements of the automaton, which abhorred the redundancy of skirts and other draperies.

My clumsy masculine vocabulary could not do justice to the resulting toilet; suffice it to say that, "from tiny slipper to the mass of dark tresses unconfined" that fell in prodigal luxuriance over the close-fitting jacket, Miss Ollie looked just the model, both in form and costume, for an ideal divinity of uncertain sex.

Unluckily, there was no one to appreciate the effect. A man's daughter being merely his daughter in any garb, Mr. Conway looked upon the outfit from a business point of view solely.

"Come!" he said, consulting his watch. "It's ten minutes after one."

Ollie took her place in the comfortably padded interior of George Washington, and his movable half was swung round and locked. Putting the key in his pocket, the father started for the outer door, but stopped half-way to say, a little anxiously:

"You don't think that young fellow who comes every day suspects anything, do you?"

The faint "Oh, no!" in reply did not seem altogether reassuring; for, as he threw open the door to the public, the exhibitor muttered:

"If he hasn't any other game in his eye, he must be chess-crazy."

As usual, Pinkerton was the first person to enter; and

he presently had the good fortune to be left alone with the automaton for a few moments.

The game was at a crisis; but no sooner had the door closed behind Mr. Conway and a departing visitor than the supposed chess-lunatic began, in a low, hurried voice, directing an imploring gaze upon the impassive visage before him:

"I have kept your secret inviolate; may I not ask a favor in return? Will you not allow me the pleasure of becoming better acquainted with one who has given me so many pleasant hours to be grateful for?"

Ollie felt sure, from the respectful tone of the request, that no ungenerous motive had prompted it; but a not unnatural reserve made her shrink from meeting anywhere else one who knew the secret of her vocation.

There was a long pause before the same musical voice that had formerly thrilled the young man made answer.

"Please do not ask anything but my gratitude, which you have manfully deserved. Could I even give my own consent to what you ask, my father would then have to know all, and he would be very much displeased with my imprudence."

Pinkerton was rather nettled at the evident reluctance of his mysterious *vis-à-vis* to a further acquaintance. Had he been better acquainted with the devious policy of an enigmatical sex, he might have complacently hugged himself instead; for an unwonted timidity is a sure sign of a woman's interest. Yet he would have pressed his claim still further, no doubt—possibly to a successful termination, for they are soft-hearted, obliging creatures, all of



IN LOVE WITH AN AUTOMATON.—"THROUGH THE STIFLING CLOUD OF BITUMINOUS SMOKE, HE SCARCELY PERCEIVED WHAT MANNER OF BEING IT WAS. HE CAUGHT IT UP IN HIS ARMS, AND BORE IT THROUGH THE PASSAGE, AND DOWN THE STAIRS."

them—had not the entrance of an inopportune visitor cut short the colloquy. The rest of that game was wretchedly played.

Next day, Pinkerton did not come at one o'clock, as usual. Whether his absence was remarked or not, the placid visage of George Washington gave no sign. To be sure, he was a little absent-minded, losing two games to an unskilled opponent.

When two o'clock of the next day came, however, without bringing the usual visitor, George showed signs of an unheroic impatience, rapping sharply on the board to quicken the movements of tardy opponents, and dashing into hazardous positions with unexampled recklessness.

At four the delinquent put in an appearance; but not alone. A fashionably dressed, rather handsome young lady accompanied him. At his solicitation she took her place at the board, and he not only watched her play with great apparent sympathy, but assisted her, now and then, with timely suggestions.

"He has told her," thought Ollie.

Her eyes flashed, and she summoned up all her energies for a supreme effort.

Without the gentleman's assistance the lady would have been no match for her; as it was, Ollie splendidly vanquished both of them. They went away, he complimenting her on the skill she had not shown.

A rough-looking countryman next stepped forward for a game; but the automaton refused to move. Mr. Conway bustled up, pretended to examine something, announced the machinery out of order, and the exhibition closed for the day.

"What was the matter, my dear," he said, anxiously, as his daughter stepped forth from her concealment with white, weary face.

"I was tired."

"Well, well," he said, apologetically, "we've only three days more to stay here, and then we'll take a vacation."

Ollie looked relieved at the prospect of getting away so soon, and went to exchange her unique garb for the ordinary street costume.

The third day after this was announced as the last of the automaton exhibition. An unusual number of persons were therefore present on the opening of the doors—so many, in fact, that Frank Pinkerton, who had resumed his regular attendance, experienced some difficulty in getting the board for a last game. All his attempts to fathom the mystery had failed, and he despaired of ever knowing more of the tantalizing unknown who was so near and yet so far off.

The game was languidly conducted on both sides. Perhaps each player was more occupied with the other than either dreamed. But in one respect, at least, that game was remarkable—it never came to an end.

The room was heated by a coal-stove that had been for some time depending for support upon three legs. A large man, setting his foot upon its decrepit side with some emphasis, gave it a start that resulted, first, in the loss of a second leg, and, finally, in the toppling over of the whole thing, bursting off the top, and scattering the fiery contents in every direction.

With that unlimited confidence in the fire department common to us all, everybody in the room ran out to give the alarm. Mr. Conway had before gone out to get change, and no one thought of the automaton but Pinkerton.

Instead of following the general rush, he sprang to the side of the figure, crying: "How can I help you?"

The room was fast filling with suffocating vapor. A half-stifled voice answered:

"The key! My father!"

The key was not to be had—the automaton was immovable. Pinkerton seized hold of an arm, and wrenched it off from the shoulder, and, inserting both hands into the gap thus made, he, by a single vigorous effort, literally halved the figure.

Through the stifling cloud of bituminous smoke, he scarcely perceived what manner of being it was. He caught it up in his arms, and bore it through the passage and down the stairs. The street safely gained, he became dimly conscious of a very pretty boy, whose long, silky hair massed itself on his, Pinkerton's, shoulder. He felt, however, none of the disgust that the sight of a long-haired youth rarely fails to awaken in every well-regulated masculine mind.

Indeed, to use a mild phrase, he protected that boy unnecessarily, not permitting him to touch the ground for an instant. Though so far from being unconscious, the boy kept continually reiterating: "Do call a carriage! Pray, take me to a carriage!"

The omnipresent hackman soon appeared, and whisked away the pair before even the *Times* reporter, who was on the ground, had learned the boy's name and occupation.

Number 54 Race Street was saved, though the fragments of George Washington were found blazing. Mr. Conway was inconsolable for a while; but what man has done man can do, and a year after a new and portlier George Washington was delighting the chess-loving citizens of New Orleans by his performances. The world-renowned chess-player, Paul Morphy, granted him the honor of two defeats, and graciously allowed that, for a wooden man, he played very well.

Ollie heard, with interest, of these proceedings through the columns of the *Picayune*, copies of which her father sent.

She has given up chess-playing for housekeeping, has exchanged the society of kings, knights and bishops for the society of a single plebeian bank-clerk; in short, she has become the wife of Mr. Francis Pinkerton.

What need to detail the steps by which this happy consummation was reached? The rescue of a young lady with whom he is already more than half in love rarely fails to finish a man of average sensibility; and as for the young lady, her attitude admits of no alternative.

And so they were married, and the automaton mystery remained unsolved, for nobody but our friend Frank ever got at "the bottom facts," and he has none of a certain celebrated namesake's appetite for making statements.

THE SEAGULL.

THIS bird, so numerous on our coast, is a bold creature, caring little for man, and being never hunted by sportsmen, seems not to decrease measurably in numbers, while other classes of birds have been nearly extirpated.

It follows steamers closely, to profit by anything thrown over by the steward or passengers, and in our bays and harbors is constantly seen sailing around, seeking stray morsels, although it depends mainly on fish, which it takes with great dexterity. It also consumes various marine creatures thrown up on the shore.

The gull is easily tamed, and can be taken far into the interior without seeming to miss the ocean air. In a garden it is a useful bird, as it destroys vermin of all kinds, and will even kill small birds that come trespassing in the place.

A friend of a naturalist had a couple of sea-gulls, which ranged the garden freely, one wing of each being clipped to prevent them from flying away. He had also a fine young