THE TEST OF LOVE.

BY EDWARD F. BIGELOW.

Associate Editor St. Nicholas, Department of Natural Science.

"Hast thou... loved the wood-rose and left it on its stalk?"—Emerson.

Author’s Note:—When one so frequently hears of love pleas that, met by refusal, turn to hate and lead even to murder, one wonders just how much of love for the object is tangled up with selfish desire for possession. If the real love is disentangled wouldn’t the young man prefer to have the young woman he loves remain unmarried or even be the bride of another, if thereby she would be happier?

Was Emerson right in advising that we show our love of the rose best if we leave it on the stalk? If so, should human love woo, even when the result of that love is not conducive to the happiness of the object loved? Or, was Emerson right? Is leaving the rose truly the higher love or is it indifference? For example, many people who admire birds in an occasional dilettante method claim to love birds more than the ornithologist who devotes a life to making a large collection.

I want you, who will read my story, if story it may be called (for it is mere reverie), to answer the question: Is there and should there be such a love that is free from entanglement of selfish possession?

“BIXBEE Street,” shouted the conductor of the overcrowded electric car.

“Ting”—a few passengers crowded out of the door and more crowded in.

“Ting, ling”—“Step ahead, make room at the door,” commanded the conductor. But not one of the passengers obeyed, for all went jerkingly backward as the car started briskly ahead.

She stepped on my foot. It was a pleasure for even the head clerk in the shipping department of Tinkell, Lathrop & Company to be trod upon by so fair a young lady. I often went back and
forth from the shipping department to the up-town office. This line was usually overcrowded and many times I had stood. But this time I had determined to keep my seat with the big bundle of books, papers, and two sample packages in my lap—all in response to a telephone message from the home office.

I was dreaming. I had been dreaming. I was in the habit of day dreaming. Was it a promotion, a reprimand, was it the wrong number; did the last shipment go by boat when it should have been rushed by train—I wonder—but that dainty foot on my little toe, and the apologetic squeal of chagrin, with a "I beg pardon," two dimples, two bright eyes, and the sweetest and briefest smile brought me to my feet at once, and then I went on and on—to the office.

But it turned out better than I expected.

"Ah, Wallace, we've got a rush in the New York office," said the President, as he looked down upon me beamingly as never before, it seemed to me. "You see, I thought I had better send you down there, so I have called Briggs to take your place. He's had a lot of experience in No. 2, and I guess he will do it all right. You can leave the books here. I'll explain to him.—Oh, yes, and I thank you for bringing up those two cases. Raymond's man is here from Boston. I was telling him about style No. 601 and the new counter support, and what was my surprise when I couldn't find one in the office—so I telephoned you to bring them with the books. I suppose you won't mind the New York office—salary is three hundred dollars more, you know. You won't mind the raise, nor object to its coming in this form. But then be a little careful. These green country boys, you know."

How his fat sides shook! He evidently thought it a good joke. "Have a cigar"—he caught up his glasses and began to wipe them on his handkerchief.

Pleased? Of course I was. This was exactly what I had dreamed of time and again, only the promotion was into a new quarter.

Why should I think of the little laugh, and the dimples, and the bright eyes, with a pang of regret mingled with it all?

But I consoled myself. I shall be at home over Sunday, and I shall travel on that line till I meet her again, and take my chances of finding out who she is.

I have it now. I recall that she spoke to the conductor when she came in, as if she knew him. It was strange how the thought of her ran through the plans of that first week in New York. I do not recall that she spoke to the conductor as if he were an acquaint-
ance, but as if she knew him only because she uses that route so often. I could recall that she had spoken to him before although it was only an inquiry as to transfer. Yet even in such a simple matter she made the inquiry graciously, with an apparently overflowing kindness of heart.

But why should I dwell so much on that little episode in the car while I am here in the New York office? Well, this change is something like. A good step ahead and three hundred dollars increase is not so bad after all. It really did pay to look carefully after those packages. I should never have had this increase if I had not. Who would have supposed that he would call me and send me here to New York. He was previously inclined to be austere and brusque. I can recall how my heart was beating with excitement, and how I dreaded the interview. Wasn't that funny how she stepped on my toe? Wonder if I'll ever forget it.

Yes, I have been at home over Sunday. "Here, Jim, file those papers and hustle, will you." Who would have thought it? Here I am in a big office in New York, making the city fellows hustle as if I owned the block. I went home over Sunday. I was right. The conductor knew her name. He often stops the car on Dover Street just half a block from her home. Her father is Colonel Tomkincs, President of the Wayne County National Bank. Has things pretty nice although they do say that he lives close to his income.

And what do you think? As good luck would have it, Tom Colkins, my assistant, knows Ralph Wainwright who is teller in her father's bank. It was through him that I got the introduction. The Old Man deposits the firm's money in that bank. He must have spoken a pretty good word for me. I met her again on that car after I had the introduction, and the smiles and the dimples and the bright eyes, how charming they were. How time does go by. I have been up there twenty-seven Sundays, or for more than six months and I have called at her house for the past twenty-four. It is only four more before she will come to New York to live. It is all arranged. The flat is sixty-five dollars a month, but on eighteen hundred and prospects of more at the end of the year, I think we can get along. She says we can, and if she can, I can, and perhaps prospective Pa will help a little. "Ralph, come over here and read off these figures." I ordered him as if I had been there for five years. But I never staid anywhere for that length of time; not often more than one year.

When the firm failed, and after I had lost another position by
falling on the side walk and breaking my leg, things seemed to go against me, and have done so ever since. I obtained another situation, a fairly good one, and I have worked, Oh, so hard. The last five years seem like a dream. Her father has done all he could, but he seems like another man since the bank failed, because the cashier was a defaulter, and the securities of Brown, Golden & Company were found to be worth only twenty cents on a dollar. She has been brave. After the death of little Winnie the cheeks were paler, the dimple not so deep, the eyes not so bright.

But we have had our joys. Life has not been entirely discouraging, although the balancing of the account in the partnership has been rather trying. I have seen anxious moments in the footing—even more anxious than when I was taking the books up to the Old Man's office. It seems strange, that I should have stood beside her without daring to speak. Her dimples were so pretty, her eyes so sparkling and the smile so sweet. I suppose it was the troubles that followed the loss of my situation, the death of the little one, the fever, and all the other trials of life. The same smile, sweeter than ever,—she bears it all so faithfully. She seems like a rose, drooping, wilting, fading, yet never complaining. I have been footing up the account. I credited up her own sweet self as she was that day when I first saw her in all her magnificent richness of beauty and happiness. I have charged to her all the little bits of happiness, all the tender love I have given her, and all the care I have had of her, and somehow, figure as I will, the account still shows excess on the credit side. Her own sweet original self was worth more than I have been able to bring to her. Would the rose have faded in other hands? Sometimes I try to console myself with the belief that it would, and that I have done as well as others could. One day I told her of the account I had been trying to make come out on my side and it wouldn't, and she laughed, and for a minute was sad, and then she laughed, again, absent-mindedly, I thought, and kissed me.

Was it a tear I saw in her eyes? No, the same brightness, only, well, not quite so bright—but deeper. For a moment then I felt as I did when I was taking those books to the office. I am responsible. Have I responded to that responsibility? As I looked at the dimple, not so deep, and the pale cheeks, I said, "You make me think of a Scamp of a boy that said he loved a rose, and broke it off. In his hands it wilted. He said he loved it, but even if so, his love cheated the rose. He was never able to give to the rose what the rose in its
own unaided self was worth.” I looked at her. She didn't speak. She nodded to the conductor.

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“Ting”—“Wilmington Street.” The crowd on the car made way for her. I got off at the next block, and took the first car back. I had been day dreaming again and had been carried for twelve blocks beyond my point of transfer. As I walked down the street, to the Old Man's office, I thought of some one of whom the world would say, "How much he loved the rose!" And I pondered. Did he love the rose or himself?