

THE EDUCATION OF UNA.

There was a time when Dr. Christopher Burke had been described - not without justice - as the dullest man and the greatest bore in Dublin. It was said that his young wife - who had been a romantic and high-spirited girl when she married him - had grown so weary of existence after a few years of his society that not even the birth of her baby girl could make it seem worth while to go on living. Soon after her death a small but sufficient legacy had enabled Dr. Christopher to carry out the desire of his heart and devote himself entirely to research work. He sold his practice forthwith and betook himself with his infant daughter to the wilds of the County Wicklow.

Here the child remained in the care of Nanny - the nurse who had been so loved and trusted by the unhappy young mother - until, some education being considered necessary, she was dispatched to a Convent Boarding School at some little distance. There she at any rate learned no harm, and in due time, she reappeared at her father's house - a finished young lady, as the good nuns reported.

Dr. Burke was by this time an acknowledged authority on some obscure diseases, and when he was not in his stuffy laboratory cultivating bacilli, he was engaged in writing ponderous volumes which only some unfortunate medical students and their examiners ever opened. Had his daughter been a microbe, or had she shown symptoms of some interesting disease, Dr. Burke might have become aware of her existence. But being merely a girl and a thoroughly healthy one at that - for with all her delicate looks she was as sound and hardy as a country maiden should be - the Doctor went placidly on without ever giving her a thought. So, deprived of her mother by death and of her father by death-in-life, the girl made for herself a world of beautiful imaginings.

where her life moved amidst dreams and visions to a stately music of its own.

Then one day, into the silent sea of this secluded life there burst, like a marauding craft, an unexpected visitor. She came bristling with guns, and determined not to return to port without bringing back in triumph the spoils of war. This practical craft was Mrs. Burke, the wife of Thomas Burke, Barrister-at-law, of Dublin City, and consequently the sister-in-law of Dr. Christopher.

"I'm your brother's wife, if not exactly a relation of your own," announced Mrs. Burke, majestically, "and so I have a right to tell you, Christopher Burke, that you are not doing your duty by your motherless girl. I have no wish to force myself upon your hospitality without an invitation, but out of this house I will not stir until you agree to let that poor child come back with me on a long visit! She has much to learn that vegetating here will never teach her."

"But her education is finished," objected the Doctor, feebly.

"My dear man," said Mrs. Burke, in pitying tones, "a girl needs more than schooling to complete her education. Let her come to me in Dublin and learn a little about life. That is what she needs now."

Dr. Burke would have parted with something much more valuable than his daughter - perhaps almost with his pet microscope - in order to get rid of this disconcerting intruder and restore the congenial dullness of his habitat. So the matter was promptly arranged, and the pirate barque departed for home waters, taking her prize in tow. Poor little unsophisticated Una had left her sheltered backwater and gone adventuring on the great seas of life.

Una's first impressions of Dublin were not very happy.

Her uncle and aunt were kind though commonplace folk, the two sons were schoolboys and negligible, but something sensitive in Una shrank and tried to hide itself from the mocking, inquisitive eyes of her girl cousin, Monica. This rather hard and matter-of-fact young person had no room in her philosophy of life for dreamers and visionaries - unless, that is, they could turn their dreams and visions to practical account by reproducing them in marketable form.

But the Burkes were in rather a gay set in Dublin, and soon Una began to take a young girl's innocent delight in the amusements that filled her days with pleasurable incident and transformed so many a night into a glimpse of fairyland. It was at a dinner-dance given in honour of Monica's twenty-first birthday that she first met Gerald O'Sullivan, the youngest, and by repute the cleverest, barrister in the city. He was still a stranger to her in all but name when she met his eyes across the dinner-table, and felt the effect of the charming smile that was at this time, had she but known it, quite a feature of certain circles in Dublin society. To Una's inexperienced mind that sudden delightful smile was something born for her alone, a swift messenger of the spirit charged with intimate and friendly meanings. A glow of pleasure quickened her pulses and made a pleasant warmth about her heart. That evening was the happiest that she had ever known. She danced and laughed and talked, and thought all her partners delightful - but she took with her to her pillow only the memory of two dark eyes and a whimsical caressing smile.

That evening, too, was the beginning of a considerable social success of Una. Her flower-like grace, and radiant youth would have given her distinction even in that city of beautiful women, but there was something else, some quality peculiar to herself, a kind of delicate aloofness and spirituality, that served to accentuate her charms. Before the winter was over she might have married quite a number of the most eligible young men in Dublin,

had the law of the land and her own inclination favoured such a course. But by this time there was only one figure in her universe, all the rest of creation consisting of mere accessories and lay figures. She sought no masculine admiration, but she accepted it with equanimity. If an admirer sang her love-songs, she listened in a pleasant dream, hearing another voice in the impassioned words. When she received love-letters and even poems, she read them with a naive pleasure, feeling that all this homage somehow made her worthier of Gerald. All of her was a gift for her heart's chosen lord, and the ardours of the unsuccessful, seemed to give the prize an added value. Her lovers called her cold and heartless and went on loving her the more. She received their protestations and their reproaches with equal serenity, for to her they had no real existence - they were merely shadows rubbed in to make a background for the shining figure of the Beloved.

Una was at this time blissfully happy. She lived in a mystic dream of love and asked for nothing more. Only to see Gerald or to hear his voice filled her with a rapt contentment, to look into his eyes, and meet the love-light there, was Heaven. All things good and glorious seemed merely an emanation from him, he was the meaning of all music and the soul of all beauty. In fact, poor little Una had fallen head over ears in love in the good old-fashioned way, believing, of course, that this splendid and rapturous emotion of hers was something wholly new upon the earth. She had no premonition of disaster, though the pricking of the beautiful bubble was very close at hand.

Mrs. Burke had been giving one of her duty dinners to some of her husband's legal friends. Una thought most of them old fogies and very uninteresting and would have been frankly bored but for the fact of Gerald's inclusion in the party. That had been enough to glorify even the dull details of the dinner-table.

Now in the softly-lighted drawing-room Monica sat at the piano, playing softly and singing. Her deep rich notes created a

magic atmosphere within the quiet room - an atmosphere in which old dreams and yearnings and half-forgotten loves would find themselves alive once more, and the strange white dreams of youth take on a shining glory. The broad windows were thrown open to the May evening, and a little wandering wind brought whiffs of flower-scent from the dim garden, a fragrant whisper from the world's deep heart of beauty.

Una sat on a low chair in a window corner, gazing out into the flower-sweet shadows. Her heart was filled with the peace of utter ecstasy; her eyes were starry, and a faint smile lit her face to tender meanings. She looked very lovely, very innocent and sweet and happy. She felt almost too happy to-night. When she had come down that evening in the new white chiffon frock that was so daintily perfect she had seen Gerald's face lit up with pleasure and admiration as he turned to her. For one long moment their eyes had met and he had held her hand, and it seemed to her that their very souls had met and mingled in that compelling gaze. A mystic exaltation lifted her to strange heights, and the thrill of a pleasure that almost hurt ran through her veins. They had spoken little - but what need of words, thought Una, when spirit and spirit rushed together in one clear flame of love. She had hardly dared to look at him again lest her too eloquent eyes should reveal their secret to any other than the Beloved.

Now, as Monica's rich contralto filled the room and quivered into the stillness beyond, Una's heart sang its own song of love and joy. Monica's voice was her one great gift, and a gift that had been cultivated to its highest point of perfection. Its emotional power was quite out of keeping with her little shallow personality. It must surely have been derived from some remote ancestress, thought Una, - some soul that had dared and agonized in the deep and passionate days of old. A man might well lose his heart and let his soul pass from his keeping to the siren who sang with such a golden voice - put

his life into her hands caring little what the future might hold of shipwreck or disaster.

As these thoughts passed through Una's mind she turned her dreaming eyes from the evening sky and looked at the singer. Monica certainly looked her best in the softly shaded evening light. She seemed at this moment fair and wholly desirable. Then Una stole a glance at the face of all faces to her, and discovered Gerald observing Monica with that grave and almost frowning intentness that betrays an absorbing interest. Following on her recent thought, this fact took on, to Una's overstrung mind, a strange significance. A sudden stab of pain turned her heart sick for a moment. The bottom seemed to have dropped out of her universe; she felt shaken and almost faint. She lay back in her deep chair and closed her eyes for one dreadful moment - then, with a mighty effort she had herself under control again. How absurd to feel this stupid fear and jealousy just because Gerald had looked at another woman! And his look was not a lover's, she felt sure. It had seemed more as if he were considering Monica - were thinking out some problem in connection with her. Then, with another dreadful pang, Una realised how little solid grounds she herself had for believing that Gerald loved her - not one definite word of understanding had passed between them, never the smallest caress. As if illumined by death-dealing lightning she suddenly knew that human love is never wholly spiritual, that even the most beautiful human soul must express itself to some extent in terms of sense. If Gerald had really loved her, would he not have told her so in unmistakable terms before now, and have claimed her love in return. He must surely know that she had many suitors - and what lover in such circumstances would be content to remain uncertain of his fate. Had she been living in a fool's paradise for all these months?

Monica had started another song, and the sad, familiar words came to Una now with a sense of desolation, of utter loneliness and heartbreak.

The years go by, but the days are long to a hungry heart,
I was feeling content last night before the wind arose -
A wind from the rainy West, tossing the wet, green boughs,
It called me and mocked me, it filled my soul with a
thousand woes.

O wind from over the sea, voice from a dear land lost,
Why need you seek me here, waking the old-time pain?
Sure my life is hard enough, there is not much joy to spare -
My heart must break or follow if you call me like that
again!

O wind from across the wave, wet with the wild sea spray,
Were I but free, like you, I never would ask to roam
From the darling land you left, and the scent of the meath-
glad hills!
Did you come to break my heart, dear wind from the hills
of home?

The song died away into a wistful silence, and then Gerald rose and walked over to Monica's side. Una could see the two heads bent together in earnest conversation. A passion of yearning and homesickness swept over her, and she felt that she could bear no more. She rose from her seat very quietly and slipped out into the darkening garden. She felt an intense longing for the mother she had never known. Oh! to be able to pillow her burning head on that loving heart and find the comfort that only mothers can give - the love and tender healing that mothers have ever waiting for the little daughters who grow up and are broken by the pain of life!

Later, when the guests had gone and the house was quiet, Monica came to her cousin's room. She wanted a gossip before retiring to rest, and Una was chosen for the post of confidante. But when Monica found the girl, not in bed, but sitting strange and ghostly in her white dress, by the open window, she uttered a little startled exclamation.

"Well, Una, you are a queer one!" she said, almost angrily, when she found it was no spectre but a being of flesh and blood who sat there so motionless in the half darkness of the summer night. "I declare you gave me quite a fright! For a moment I

thought you were a ghost. I expected you to be in bed and asleep by this time."

"And so you came to wake me up and spoil my dreams," said Una, forcing a smile.

"I think you dream a great deal too much both asleep and awake," said Monica. "I'm sure all this dreaming and star-gazing can't be good for you. You ought to be married and have half-a-dozen children to look after. That would soon take the poetry out of you! By the way, that reminds me - Gerald O'Sullivan asked me to marry him to-night."

Monica turned on the light, settled herself in front of the mirror, and began brushing out the long strands of her hair.

There was a perceptible silence, and then Una heard a strange impersonal voice inquire--"And what did you answer?" The voice came from her, it seemed, but without any volition of her own. She was trembling, and a dreadful coldness and numbness seemed to have turned her very heart to ice. The other girl was occupied with herself, and noticed nothing.

"I put him off," said Monica. "A girl can't be expected to decide a thing like that all in a moment. Of course he is quite well off, as Irishmen of our class go, and very good-looking and clever and all that - in fact, quite an eligible person in every way! But, between you and me, I find his many perfections just a trifle wearisome. I think my dear Gerald is just the least little bit of a poseur. Besides, he is not what one could call a very ardent lover. I had no idea of such a thing coming when he sprang his proposal on me to-night - you could have knocked me down with a feather when he started! I'm wondering if my £10,000 from Uncle John has had anything to do with opening his eyes to my virtues. A bit of money has a wonderful effect that way, sometimes. Love may be blind, but money is a great eye-opener."

"Oh Monica, don't!" cried Una passionately. "How can you say such horrible things?"

"They're not a bit horrible," said Monica, calmly. "I am

only looking at things sensibly. What is the good of going through life blindfold? Facts are facts, and only fools and politicians can afford to ignore them. I am not in love with Gerald, and I don't believe he is a bit in love with me. But he is a good match for all that, and I'll very likely marry him. I think most of the stuff people write about love is just fudge. Don't you? But of course you wouldn't - people who read poetry are always rather silly."

Una made no reply, so Monica went on - "I haven't said anything to Father or Mother yet. I won't tell them until I have quite made up my mind what to do. I know they'll be very keen on my marrying Gerald - they think such a lot of him. Of course, it will be very nice to cut out all the other girls. Half the girls in Dublin are mad about Gerald, and he never bothers his head about any of them. You are about the only girl in our set who doesn't consider herself in love with him. But then you are too cold and queer to care much for any man. All the girls say so."

Suddenly Una laughed - a wild, uncanny laugh that echoed strangely in the quiet night. Monica turned from the mirror in resentful remonstrance.

"Well, of all the weird creatures!" she said, impatiently. "for goodness sake, Una, don't make such a horrible row, or you will have Mother in to see what's the matter. If you must laugh like that, do, for Heaven's sake, stuff a cushion or something into your mouth. Though I don't see anything to laugh at, I must say. I hope there is nothing so excruciatingly funny in the fact of my receiving a proposal of marriage!"

"I will never laugh again," said Una, speaking as if to herself.

"You needn't be huffy just because I asked you not to make an unholy row," said Monica. "I think I'll toddle off to bed now. I'm getting sleepy. Good night, dear girl, and take my advice and get off to bed yourself. You look more like a ghost than a real live human being at this moment. Those great staring eyes of yours

are enough to give anybody the creeps. It's my opinion you want a dose of cod liver oil or something of that sort. I'll speak to Mother about it. Good-night and sweet dreams to you! - and not a word to a soul of what I've been telling you."

When she had gone, Monica sank down on the floor in a huddled heap. All her life-force seemed gone - drowned in waves of misery and humiliation. The winged love whose angelic sweetness she had cherished and held to her bosom had changed into a grinning ape, and mocked her with loathsome grimaces. She felt degraded, common, unclean - hideous with the slime of vulgarity. Her god was no god, but something less than man. Oh! what a fool - what a fool - what a fool she had been! How all those other girls who were "mad" about Gerald would laugh if they knew - well, thank God, they would never know! They thought her too cold and queer to care much for any man - so Monica had said.

"Oh, God! Oh, God!" she moaned, in intolerable pain and shame, seeing no light or hope anywhere, then with a little heartbroken cry - "O Nanny! Nanny!" she broke into a low tearless sobbing. In this moment of utter anguish her heart instinctively cried out for the dearest approach to mother-love that she had known - the dear affection that had guarded her lonely childhood.

But this was not a hurt that could be kissed and charmed away like the little bruises of those childish days, even had Nanny been near enough to hear her nursing's cry. Her salvation now was something that Una must work out for herself in much loneliness and tribulation of spirit, must win by the strife and agony of many bitter years. Healing, if healing there would be, must come from within, from the hidden depths of her own nature. And of this the girl was dimly aware as she crouched there in the ghostly night, alone with the ruins of the beautiful idol she had made. Her education was indeed complete. She had learned a little about life.