

An Original Belle

E. P. Roe

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An Original Belle

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By: E. P. Roe

1900

PREFACE.

No race of men, scarcely an individual, is so devoid of intelligence as not to recognize power. Few gifts are more courted. Power is almost as varied as character, and the kind of power most desired or appreciated is a good measure of character. The pre-eminence furnished by thew and muscle is most generally recognized; but, as men reach levels above the animal, other qualities take the lead. It is seen that the immaterial spirit wins the greater triumphs,—that the brainless giant, compared with the dwarf of trained intelligence, can accomplish little. The scale runs on into the moral qualities, until at last humanity has given its sanction to the Divine words, "Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant." The few who have successfully grasped the lever of which Archimedes dreamed are those who have attained the highest power to serve the world.

Among the myriad phases of power, perhaps that of a gifted and beautiful woman is the most subtle and hard to define. It is not the result of mere beauty, although that may be an important element; and if wit, intelligence, learning, accomplishments, and goodness are added, all combined cannot wholly explain the power that some women possess. Deeper, perhaps more potent, than all else, is an individuality which distinguishes one woman from all others, and imparts her own peculiar fascination. Of course, such words do not apply to those who are content to be commonplace themselves, and who are satisfied with the ordinary homage of ordinary minds, or the conventional attention of men who are incited to nothing better.

One of the purposes of this story is to illustrate the power of a young girl not so beautiful or so good as many of her sisters. She was rather commonplace at first, but circumstances led her to the endeavor to be true to her own nature and conscience and to adopt a very simple scheme of life. She achieved no marvellous success, nothing beyond the ability of multitudes like herself.

I have also sought to reproduce with some color of life and reality a critical period in our civil war. The scenes and events of the story culminate practically in the summer of 1863. The novel was not written for the sake of the scenes or events. They are employed merely to illustrate character at the time and to indicate its development.

The reader in the South must be bitter and prejudiced indeed if he does not discover that I have sought to be fair to the impulses and motives of its people.

In touching upon the Battle of Gettysburg and other historical

events, I will briefly say that I have carefully consulted authentic sources of information. For the graphic suggestion of certain details I am indebted to the "History of the 124th Regt. N.Y.S.V.," by Col. Charles H. Weygant, to the recollections of Capt. Thomas Taft and other veterans now living.

Lieut.-Col. H. C. Hasbrouck, commandant of Cadets at West Point, has kindly read the proof of chapters relating to the battle of Gettysburgh.

My story is also related to the New York Draft Riots of 1863, an historical record not dwelt upon before in fiction to my knowledge. It is almost impossible to impart an adequate impression of that reign of terror. I have not hoped to do this, or to give anything like a detailed and complete account of events. The scenes and incidents described, however, had their counterpart in fact. Rev. Dr. Howard Crosby of New York saw a young man face and disperse a mob of hundreds, by stepping out upon the porch of his home and shooting the leader. This event took place late at night.

I have consulted "Sketches of the Draft Riots in 1863," by Hon. J. T. Headley, the files of the Press of that time, and other records.

The Hon. Thomas C. Acton. Superintendent of the Metropolitan Police during the riot, accorded me a hearing, and very kindly followed the thread of my story through the stormy period in question.

E. P. R

CORNWALL-ON-HUDSON, N.Y., AUG. 7, 1885.

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AN ORIGINAL BELLE.

CHAPTER I.

A RUDE AWAKENING.

MARIAN VOSBURGH had been content with her recognized position as a leading belle. An evening spent in her drawing-room revealed that; but at the close of the particular evening which it was our privilege to select there occurred a trivial incident. She was led to think, and thought is the precursor of action and change in all natures too strong and positive to drift. On that night she was an ordinary belle, smiling, radiant, and happy in following the traditions of her past.

She had been admired as a child, as a school-girl, and given a place among the stars of the first magnitude since her formal debut. Admiration was as essential as sunshine; or, to change the figure, she had a large and a natural and healthful appetite for it. She was also quite as much entitled to it as the majority of her class.

Thus far she had accepted life as she found it, and was in the main conventional. She was not a deliberate coquette; it was not her recognized purpose to give a heartache to as many as possible; she merely enjoyed in thoughtless exultation her power to attract young men to her side. There was keen excitement in watching them, from the moment of introduction, as they passed through the phases of formal acquaintanceship into relations that bordered on sentiment. When this point was reached experiences sometimes followed which caused not a little compunction.

She soon learned that society was full of men much like herself in some respects, ready to meet new faces, to use their old compliments and flirtation methods over and over again. They could look unutterable things at half a dozen different girls in the same season, while their hearts remained as invulnerable as old-fashioned pin-cushions, heart-shaped, that adorn country "spare rooms." But now and then a man endowed with a deep, strong nature would finally leave her side in troubled wonder or bitter cynicism. Her fair, young face, her violet eyes, so dark as to appear almost black at night, had given no token that she could amuse herself with feelings that touched the sources of life and death in such admirers.

"They should have known better, that I was not in earnest," she would say, petulantly, and more or less remorsefully.

But these sincere men, who had been so blind as to credit her with gentle truth and natural intuition, had some ideal of womanhood which had led to their blunder. Conscious of revealing so much themselves by look, tone, and touch of hand, eager to supplement one significant glance by life-long loyalty, they were slow in understanding that answering significant glances meant only, "I like you very well,--better than others, just at present; but then I may meet some one to-morrow who is a great deal more fun than you are."

Fun! With them it was a question of manhood, of life, and of that which gives the highest value and incentive to life. It was inevitable, therefore, that Marian Vosburgh should become a mirage to more than one man; and when at last the delusion vanished, there was usually a flinty desert to be crossed before the right, safe path was gained.

From year to year Mr. Vosburgh had rented for his summer residence a pretty cottage on the banks of the Hudson. The region abounded in natural beauty and stately homes. There was an infusion of Knickerbocker blood in the pre-eminently elect ones of society, and from these there was a gradual shading off in several directions, until by some unwritten law the social line was drawn. Strangers from the city might be received within the inner circle, or they might not, as some of the leaders practically decreed by their own action. Mr. Vosburgh did not care in the least for the circle or its constituents. He was a stern, quiet man; one of the strong executive hands of the government at a time when the vital questions of the day had come to the arbitrament of the sword. His calling involved danger, and required an iron will. The questions which chiefly occupied his mind were argued by the mouths of cannon.

As for Marian, she too cared little for the circle and its social dignitaries. She had no concessions to make, no court to pay.

She was not a dignitary, but a sovereign, and had her own court. Gentleman friends from the city made their headquarters at a neighboring summer hotel; young men from the vicinity were attracted like moths, and the worst their aristocratic sisters could say against the girl was that she had too many male friends, and was not "of their set." Indeed, with little effort she could have won recognition from the bluest blood of the vicinage; but this was not her ambition. She cared little for the ladies of her neighborhood, and less for their ancestors, while she saw as much of the gentlemen as she desired. She had her intimates among her own sex, however, and was on the best terms with her good-natured, good-hearted, but rather superficial mother, who was a discreet, yet indulgent chaperon, proud of her daughter and of the attention she received, while scarcely able to comprehend that any serious trouble could result from it if the proprieties of life were complied with. Marian was never permitted to give that kind of encouragement which compromises a girl, and Mrs. Vosburgh felt that there her duty ceased. All that could be conveyed by the eloquent eye, the inflection of tones, and in a thousand other ways, was unnoted, and beyond her province.

The evening of our choice is an early one in June. The air is slightly chilly and damp, therefore the parlor is preferable to the vine-sheltered piazza, screened by the first tender foliage. We can thus observe Miss Vosburgh's deportment more closely, and take a brief note of her callers.

Mr. Lane is the first to arrive, perhaps for the reason that he is a downright suitor, who has left the city and business, in order to further the interests nearest his heart. He is a keen-eyed, strong-looking fellow, well equipped for success by knowledge of the world and society; resolute, also, in attaining his desired ends. His attentions to Marian have been unmistakable for some months, and he believes that he has received encouragement. In truth, he has been the recipient of the delusive regard that she is in the habit of bestowing. He is one whom she could scarcely fail to admire and like, so entertaining is he in conversation, and endowed with such vitality and feeling that his words are not airy nothings.

He greets her with a strong pressure of the hand, and his first glance reveals her power.

"Why, this is an agreeable surprise, Mr. Lane," she exclaims.

"Agreeable? I am very glad to hear that," he says, in his customary direct speech. "Yes, I ran up from the city this afternoon. On my way to lunch I became aware of the beauty of the day, and as my thoughts persisted in going up the river I was led to follow them. One's life does not consist wholly of business, you know; at least mine does not."

"Yet you have the reputation of being a busy man."

"I should hope so. What would you think of a young fellow not busy in these times?"

"I am not sure I should think at all. You give us girls too much credit for thinking."

"Oh, no; there's no occasion for the plural. I don't give 'us girls' anything. I am much too busy for that. But I know you think, Miss Marian, and have capacity for thought."

"Possibly you are right about the capacity. One likes to think one has brains, you know, whether she uses them or not. I don't think very much, however,—that is, as you use the word, for it implies the putting of one's mind on something and keeping it there. I like to let thoughts come and go as the clouds do in our June skies. I don't mean thunder-clouds and all they signify, but light vapors that have scarcely beginning or end, and no very definite being. I don't seem to have time or inclination for anything else, except when I meet you with your positive ways. I think it is very kind of you to come from New York to give me a pleasant evening."

"I'm not so very disinterested. New York has become a dull place, and if I aid you to pass a pleasant evening you insure a pleasanter one for me. What have you been doing this long June day, that you have been too busy for thought?"

"Let me see. What have I been doing? What an uncomfortable question to ask a girl! You men say we are nothing but butterflies, you know."

"I never said that of you."

"You ask a question which makes me say it virtually of myself. That is a way you keen lawyers have. Very well; I shall be an honest witness, even against myself. That I wasn't up with the lark this morning goes without saying. The larks that I know much about are on the wing after dinner in the evening. The forenoon is a variable sort of affair with many people. Literally I suppose it ends at 12 M., but with me it is rounded off by lunch, and the time of that event depends largely upon the kitchen divinity that we can lure to this remote and desolate region. 'Faix,' remarked that potentate, sniffing around disdainfully the day we arrived, 'does yez expects the loikes o' me to stop in this lonesomeness? We're jist at the ind of the wourld.' Mamma increased her wages, which were already double what she earns, and she still condescends to provide our daily food, giving me a forenoon which closes at her convenience. During this indefinite period I look after my flowers and birds, sing and play a little, read a little, entertain a little, and thus reveal to you a general littleness. In the afternoon I take a nap, so that I may be wide awake enough to talk to a bright man like you in case he should appear. Now, are you not shocked and pained at my frivolous life?"

"You have come to the country for rest and recuperation, Miss Marian?"

"Oh, what a word,—'recuperation!' It never entered my head that I had come into the country for that. Do I suggest a crying need for recuperation?"

"I wouldn't dare tell you all that you suggest to me, and I read more than you say between your lines. When I approached the house you were chatting and laughing genially with your mother."

"Oh, yes, mamma and I have as jolly times together as two girls."

"That was evident, and it made a very pleasant impression on me. One thing is not so evident, and it indicates a rather one-sided condition of affairs. I could not prevent my thoughts from visiting you often to-day before I came myself, but I fear that among your June-day occupations there has not been one thought of me."

She had only time to say, sotto voce, "Girls don't tell everything," when the maid announced, from the door, "Mr. Strahan."

This second comer was a young man precociously mature after a certain style. His home was a fine old place in the vicinity, but in his appearance there was no suggestion of the country; nor did he resemble the violet, although he was somewhat redolent of the extract of that modest flower. He was dressed in the extreme of the prevailing mode, and evidently cultivated a metropolitan air, rather than the unobtrusive bearing of one who is so thoroughly a gentleman that he can afford to be himself. Mr. Strahan was quite sure of his welcome, for he felt that he brought to the little cottage a genuine Madison-avenue atmosphere. He was greeted with the cordiality which made Miss Vosburgh's drawing-room one of the pleasantest of lounging-places, whether in town or country; and under his voluble lead conversation took the character of fashionable gossip, which would have for the reader as much interest as the presentation of some of the ephemeral weeds of that period. But Mr. Strahan's blue eyes were really animated as he ventured perilously near a recent scandal in high life. His budget of news was interspersed with compliments to his hostess, which, like the extract on his handkerchief, were too pronounced. Mr. Lane regarded him with politely veiled disgust, but was too well-bred not to second Miss Vosburgh's remarks to the best of his ability.

Before long two or three more visitors dropped in. One from the hotel was a millionaire, a widower leisurely engaged in the selection of a second wife. Another was a young artist sketching in the vicinity. A third was an officer from West Point who knew Mr. Vosburgh. There were also callers from the neighborhood during the evening. Mrs. Vosburgh made her appearance early, and was almost as skilful a hostess as her daughter. But few of the guests remained long. They had merely come to enjoy a pleasant half-hour or more under circumstances eminently agreeable, and would then drive on and pay one or two visits in the vicinity. That was the way in which nearly all Marian's "friendships" began.

The little parlor resounded with animated talk, laughter, and music, that was at the same time as refined as informal. Mrs. Vosburgh would seat herself at the piano, that a new dancing-step or a new song might be tried. The gentlemen were at liberty to light their cigars and form groups among themselves, so free from stiffness was Marian's little salon. Brief time elapsed, however, without a word to each, in her merry, girlish voice, for she had the instincts of a successful hostess, and a good-natured sense of honor, which made her feel that each guest was entitled to attention. She was not much given to satire, and the young men soon learned that she would say more briery things to their faces than behind their backs. It was also discovered that ill-natured remarks about callers who had just departed were not tolerated,—that within certain limits she was loyal to her friends, and that, she was too high-minded to

she speak unhandsomely of one whom she had just greeted cordially. If she did not like a man she speedily froze him out of the ranks of her acquaintance; but for such action there was not often occasion, since she and her mother had a broad, easy tolerance of those generally accepted by society. Even such as left her parlor finally with wounds for which there was no rapid healing knew that no one would resent a jest at their expense more promptly than the girl whom they might justly blame for having smiled too kindly.

Thus she remained a general favorite. It was recognized that she had a certain kind of loyalty which could be depended upon. Of course such a girl would eventually marry, and with natural hope and egotism each one felt that he might be the successful competitor. At any rate, as in war, they must take their chances, and it seems that there is never a lack of those willing to assume such risks.

Thus far, however, Marian had no inclination to give up her present life of variety and excitement. She preferred incense from many worshippers to the devotion of one. The secret of this was perhaps that her heart had remained so untouched and unconscious that she scarcely knew she had one. She understood the widower's preference, enjoyed the compliment, and should there be occasion would, in perfect good taste, beg to be excused.

Her pulse was a little quickened by Mr. Lane's downright earnestness, and when matters should come to a crisis she would say lovely things to him of her esteem, respect, regret, etc. She would wish they might remain friends--why could they not, when she liked him so much? As for love and engagement, she did not, could not, think of that yet.

She was skilful, too, in deferring such crises, and to-night, in obedience to a signal, Mrs. Vosburgh remained until even Mr. Lane despaired of another word in private, and departed, fearing to put his fate to the test.

At last the dainty apartment, the merry campaigning-ground, was darkened, and Marian, flushed, wearied, and complacent, stepped out on the piazza to breathe for a few moments the cool, fragrant air. She had dropped into a rustic seat, and was thinking over the events of the evening with an amused smile, when the following startling words arose from the adjacent shrubbery:--

"Arrah, noo, will ye niver be sinsible? Here I'm offerin' ye me heart, me loife. I'd be glad to wourk for ye, and kape ye loike a leddy. I'd be thrue to ye ivery day o' me loife,--an' ye knows it, but ye jist goes on makin' eyes at this wan an' flirtin' wid that wan an' spakin' swate to the t'other, an' kapin' all on the string till they can nayther ate nor slape nor be half the min they were till ye bewildered 'em. Ye're nothin' but a giddy, light-minded, shallow crather, a spoilin' min for your own fun. I've kep' company wid ye a year, and ye've jist blowed hot and cowld till I'm not meself any more, and have come nigh losin' me place. Noo, by St. Patrick, ye must show whether ye're a woman or a heartless jade that will sind a man to the divil for sport."

These words were poured out with the impetuosity of longsuffering endurance finally vanquished, and before the speaker had concluded Marian was on her way to the door, that she might not listen to a

conversation of so delicate a nature. But she did not pass beyond hearing before part of the reply reached her.

"Faix, an' I'm no wourse than me young mistress."

It was a chance arrow, but it went straight to the mark, and when Marian reached her room her cheeks were aflame.

CHAPTER II.

A NEW ACQUAINTANCE.

Gross matter can change form and character in a moment, when merely touched by the effective agent. It is easy to imagine, therefore, how readily a woman's quick mind might be influenced by a truth or a thought of practical and direct application. All the homilies ever written, all the counsel of matrons and sages, could not have produced on Marian so deep an impression as was made by these few chance words. They came as a commentary, not only on her past life, but on the past few hours. Was it true, then, that she was no better than the coquettish maid, the Irish servant in the family's employ? Was she, with her education and accomplishments, her social position and natural gifts, acting on no higher plane, influenced by no worthier motives and no loftier ambition? Was the ignorant girl justified in quoting her example in extenuation of a course that to a plain and equally ignorant man seemed unwomanly to the last degree?

Wherein was she better? Wherein lay the difference between her and the maid?

She covered her hot face with her hands as the question took the form: "Wherein am I worse? Is not our principle of action the same, while I have greater power and have been crippling higher types of men, and giving them, for sport, an impulse towards the devil? Fenton Lane has just gone from my side with trouble in his eyes. He will not be himself to-morrow, not half the man he might be. He left me in doubt and fear. Could I do anything oppressed with doubt and fear? He has set his heart on what can never be. Could I have prevented him from doing this? One thing at least is certain,--I have not tried to prevent it, and I fear there have been many little nameless things which he would regard as encouragement. And he is only one. With others I have gone farther and they have fared worse. It is said that Mr. Folger, whom I refused last winter, is becoming dissipated. Mr. Arton shuns society and sneers at women. Oh, don't let me think of any more. What have I been doing that this coarse kitchen-maid can run so close a parallel between her life and mine? How unwomanly and repulsive it all seems, as that man put it! My delight and pride have been my gentleman friends, and what one of them is the better, or has a better prospect for

life, because of having known me? Could there be a worse satire on all the fine things written about woman and her influence than my hitherto vain and complacent self?"

Sooner or later conscience tells the truth to all; and the sooner the better, unless the soul arraigned is utterly weak, or else belongs essentially to the criminal classes, which require almost a miracle to reverse their evil gravitation. Marian Vosburgh was neither weak nor criminal at heart. Thus far she had yielded thoughtlessly, inconsiderately, rather than deliberately, to the circumstances and traditions of her life. Her mother had been a belle and something of a coquette, and, having had her career, was in the main a good and sensible wife. She had given her husband little trouble if not much help. She had slight interest in that which made his life, and slight comprehension of it, but in affectionate indifference she let him go his way, and was content with her domestic affairs, her daughter, and her novel. Marian had unthinkingly looked forward to much the same experience as her natural lot. To-night she found herself querying: "Are there men to-day who are not half what they might have been because of mamma's delusive smiles? Have any gone down into shadows darker than those cast by misfortune and death, because she permitted herself to become the light of their lives and then turned away?"

Then came the rather painful reflection: "Mamma is not one to be troubled by such thoughts. It does not even worry her that she is so little to papa, and that he virtually carries on his life-work alone. I don't see how I can continue my old life after to-night. I had better shut myself up in a convent; yet just how I can change everything I scarcely know."

The night proved a perturbed and almost sleepless one from the chaos and bitterness of her thoughts. The old was breaking up; the new, beginning.

The morning found her listless, discontented, and unhappy. The glamour had faded out of her former life. She could not continue the tactics practised in coarse imitation by the Irish servant, who took her cue as far as possible from her mistress. The repugnance was due as much to the innate delicacy and natural superiority of Marian's nature as to her conscience. Her clear, practical sense perceived that her course differed from the other only in being veneered by the refinements of her social position,—that the evil results were much greater. The young lady's friends were capable of receiving more harm than the maid could inflict upon her acquaintances.

There would be callers again during the day and evening, and she did not wish to see them. Their society now would be like a glass of champagne from which the life had effervesced.

At last in her restlessness and perplexity she decided to spend a day or two with her father in their city home, where he was camping out, as he termed it. She took a train to town, and sent a messenger boy to his office with a note asking him to dine with her.

Mr. Vosburgh looked at her a little inquiringly as he entered his home, which had the comfortless aspect of a city house closed for the summer.

"Am I de trop, papa? I have come to town for a little quiet, and to do some shopping."

"Come to New York for quiet?"

"Yes. The country is the gayest place now, and you know a good many are coming and going. I am tired, and thought an evening or two with you would be a pleasant change. You are not too busy?"

"It certainly will be a change for you, Marian."

"Now there's a world of satire in that remark, and deserved, too, I fear. Mayn't I stay?"

"Yes, indeed, till you are tired of me; and that won't be long in this dull place, for we are scarcely in a condition now to receive callers, you know."

"What makes you think I shall be tired of you soon, papa?"

"Oh--well--I'm not very entertaining. You appear to like variety. I suppose it is the way with girls."

"You are not consumed with admiration for girls' ways, are you, papa?"

"I confess, my dear, that I have not given the subject much research. As a naturalist would say, I have no doubt that you and your class have curious habits and interesting peculiarities. There is a great deal of life, you know, which a busy man has to accept in a general way, especially when charged with duties which are a severe and constant strain upon his mind. I try to leave you and your mother as free from care as possible. You left her well, I trust?"

"Very well, and all going on as usual. I'm dissatisfied with myself, papa, and you unconsciously make me far more so. Is a woman to be only a man's plaything, and a dangerous one at that?"

"Why, Marian, you ARE in a mood! I suppose a woman, like a man, can be very much what she pleases. You certainly have had a chance to find out what pleases most women in your circle of acquaintances, and have made it quite clear what pleases you."

"Satire again," she said, despondently. "I thought perhaps you could advise and help me."

He came and took her face between his hands, looking earnestly into her troubled blue eyes.

"Are you not content to be a conventional woman?" he asked, after a moment.

"No!" was her emphatic answer.

"Well, there are many ways of being a little outre in this age and land, especially at this stormy period. Perhaps you want a career,--something that will give you a larger place in the public eye?"

She turned away to hide the tears that would come. "O papa, you don't understand me at all, and I scarcely understand myself," she faltered. "In some respects you are as conventional as mamma, and are almost a Turk in your ideas of the seclusion of women. The idea of my wanting public notoriety! As I feel now, I'd rather go to a convent."

"We'll go to dinner first; then a short drive in the park, for you look pale, and I long for a little fresh air myself. I have been at my desk since seven this morning, and have had only a sandwich."

"Why do you have to work so hard, papa?"

"I can give you two reasons in a breath,--you mentioned 'shopping,' and my country is at war. They don't seem very near of kin, do they? Documents relating to both converge in my desk, however."

"Have I sent you more bills than usual?"

"Not more than usual."

"I believe I'm a fool."

"I know you are a very pretty little girl, who will feel better after dinner and a drive," was the laughing reply.

They were soon seated in a quiet family restaurant, but the young girl was too perturbed in mind to enjoy the few courses ordered. With self-reproach she recognized the truth that she was engaged in the rather unusual occupation of becoming acquainted with her father. He sat before her, with his face, generally stern and inscrutable, softened by a desire to be companionable and sympathetic. According to his belief she now had "a mood," and after a day or two of quiet retirement from the world she would relapse into her old enjoyment of social attention, which would be all the deeper for its brief interruption.

Mr. Vosburgh was of German descent. In his daily life he had become Americanized, and was as practical in his methods as the shrewd people with whom he dealt, and whom he often outwitted. Apart from this habit of coping with life just as he found it, he had an inner nature of which few ever caught a glimpse,--a spirit and an imagination deeply tinged with German ideality and speculation. Often, when others slept, this man, who appeared so resolute, hard, and uncompromising in the performance of duties, and who was understood by but few, would read deeply in metaphysics and romantic poetry. Therefore, the men and women who dwelt in his imagination were not such as he had much to do with in real life. Indeed, he had come to regard the world of reality and that of fancy as entirely distinct, and to believe that only here and there, as a man or woman possessed something like genius, would there be a marked deviation from ordinary types. The slight differences, the little characteristic meannesses or felicities that distinguished one from another, did not count for very much in his estimation. When a knowledge of such individual traits was essential to his plans, he mastered them with singular keenness and quickness of comprehension. When such knowledge was unnecessary, or as soon as it ceased to be of service, he dismissed the extraneous personalities from his mind almost as completely as if they had had no existence. Few men were less

embarrassed with acquaintances than he; yet he had an observant eye and a retentive memory. When he wanted a man he rarely failed to find the right one. In the selection and use of men he appeared to act like an intelligent and silent force, rather than as a man full of human interests and sympathies. He rarely spoke of himself, even in the most casual way. Most of those with whom he mingled knew merely that he was an agent of the government, and that he kept his own counsel. His wife was to him a type of the average American woman,--pretty, self-complacent, so nervous as to require kind, even treatment, content with feminalities, and sufficiently intelligent to talk well upon every-day affairs. In her society he smiled at her, said "Yes," good-humoredly, to almost everything, and found slight incentive to depart from his usual reticence. She had learned the limits of her range, and knew that within it there was entire liberty, beyond it a will like adamant. They got on admirably together, for she craved nothing further in the way of liberty and companionship than was accorded her, while he soon recognized that the prize carried off from other competitors could no more follow him into his realm of thought and action than she could accompany him on a campaign. At last he had concluded philosophically that it was just as well. He was engaged in matters that should not be interfered with or babbled about, and he could come and go without questioning. He had occasionally thought: "If she were such a woman as I have read of and imagined,--if she could supplement my reason with the subtilty of intuition and the reticence which some of her sex have manifested,--she would double my power and share my inner life, for there are few whom I can trust. The thing is impossible, however, and so I am glad she is content."

As for Marian, she had promised, in his view, to be but a charming repetition of her mother, with perhaps a mind of larger calibre. She had learned more and had acquired more accomplishments, but all this resulted, possibly, from her better advantages. Her drawing-room conversation seemed little more than the ordinary small talk of the day, fluent and piquant, while the girl herself was as undisturbed by the vital questions of the hour and of life, upon which he dwelt, as if she had been a child. He knew that she received much attention, but it excited little thought on his part, and no surprise. He believed that her mother was perfectly competent to look after the proprieties, and that young fellows, as had been the case with himself, would always seek pretty, well-bred girls, and take their chances as to what the women who might become their wives should prove to be.

Marian looked with awakening curiosity and interest at the face before her, yet it was the familiar visage of her father. She had seen it all her life, but now felt that she had never before seen it in its true significance--its strong lines, square jaw, and quiet gray eyes, with their direct, steady gaze. He had come and gone before her daily, petted her now and then a little, met her requests in the main good-humoredly, paid her bills, and would protect her with his life; yet a sort of dull wonder came over her as she admitted to herself that he was a stranger to her. She knew little of his work and duty, less of his thoughts, the mental realm in which the man himself dwelt. What were its landmarks, what its characteristic features, she could not tell. One may be familiar with the outlines of a country on a map, yet be ignorant of the scenery, productions, inhabitants, governing forces, and principles. Her very father was to her but a man in outline. She knew little of

the thoughts that peopled his brain, of the motives and principles that controlled his existence, giving it individuality, and even less of the resulting action with which his busy life abounded. Although she had crossed the threshold of womanhood, she was still to him the self-pleasing child that he had provided for since infancy; and he was, in her view, the man to whom, according to the law of nature and the family, she was to look for the maintenance of her young life, with its almost entire separation in thoughts, pleasures, and interests. She loved him, of course. She had always loved him, from the time when she had stretched forth her baby hands to be taken and fondled for a few moments and then relinquished to others. Practically she had dwelt with others ever since. Now, as a result, she did not understand him, nor he her. She would miss him as she would oxygen from the air. Now she began to perceive that, although he was the unobtrusive source of her life, home, education, and the advantages of her lot, he was not impersonal, but a human being as truly as herself. Did he want more from her than the common and instinctive affection of a child for its parent? If to this she added intelligent love, appreciation, and sympathy, would he care? If she should be able to say, "Papa, I am kin to you, not merely in flesh and blood, but in mind, hope, and aspiration; I share with you that which makes your life, with its success and failure, not as the child who may find luxurious externals curtailed or increased, but as a sympathetic woman who understands the more vital changes in spiritual vicissitude,"--if she could truthfully say all this, would he be pleased and reveal himself to her?

Thoughts like these passed through her mind as they dined together and drove in the park. When at last they returned and sat in the dimly-lighted parlor, Mr. Vosburgh recognized that her "mood" had not passed away.

CHAPTER III.

A NEW FRIEND.

"MARIAN," asked her father, after smoking awhile in silence, "what did you mean by your emphatic negative when I asked you if you were not content to be a conventional woman? How much do you mean?"

"I wish you would help me find out, papa."

"How! don't you know?"

"I do not; I am all at sea."

"Well, my dear, to borrow your own illustration, you can't be far from shore yet. Why not return? You have seemed entirely satisfied thus far."

"Were you content with me, papa?"

"I think you have been a very good little girl, as girls go."

"'Good little girl, as girls go;' that's all."

"That's more than can be said of many."

"Papa, I'm not a little girl; I am a woman of twenty years."

"Yes, I know; and quite as sensible as many at forty."

"I am no companion for you."

"Indeed you are; I've enjoyed having you with me this evening exceedingly."

"Yes, as you would have enjoyed my society ten years ago. I've been but a little girl to you all the time. Do you know the thought that has been uppermost in my mind since you joined me?"

"How should I? How long does one thought remain uppermost in a girl's mind?"

"I don't blame you for your estimate. My thought is this,--we are not acquainted with each other."

"I think I was acquainted with you, Marian, before this mood began."

"Yes, I think you were; yet I was capable of this 'mood,' as you call it, before."

"My child," said Mr. Vosburgh, coming to her side and stroking her hair, "I have spoken more to draw you out than for anything else. Heaven forbid that you for a moment should think me indifferent to anything that relates to your welfare! You wish me to advise, to help you. Before I can do this I must have your confidence, I must know your thoughts and impulses. You can scarcely have a purpose yet. Even a quack doctor will not attempt diagnosis or prescribe his nostrum without some knowledge of the symptoms. When I last saw you in the country you certainly appeared like a conventional society girl of an attractive type, and were evidently satisfied so to remain. You see I speak frankly, and reveal to you my habit of making quick practical estimates, and of taking the world as I find it. You say you were capable of this mood--let us call it an aspiration--before. I do not deny this, yet doubt it. When people change it is because they are ripe, or ready for change, as are things in nature. One can force or retard nature; but I don't believe much in intervention. With many I doubt whether there is even much opportunity for it. They are capable of only the gradual modification of time and circumstances. Young people are apt to have spasms of enthusiasm, or of self-reproach and dissatisfaction. These are of little account in the long run, unless there is fibre enough in character to face certain questions, decide them, and then act resolutely on definite lines of conduct. I have now given you my views, not as to a little child, but as to a mature woman of twenty. Jestings apart, you ARE old enough, Marian, to think for yourself, and decide whether you will be conventional or not. The probabilities are that you will follow the traditions of your

past in a very ladylike way. That is the common law. You are too well-bred and refined to do anything that society would condemn."

"You are not encouraging, papa."

"Nor am I discouraging. If you have within you the force to break from your traditions and stop drifting, you will make the fact evident. If you haven't it would be useless for me to attempt to drag, drive, or coax you out of old ways. I am too busy a man to attempt the useless. But until you tell me your present mental attitude, and what has led to it, we are talking somewhat at random. I have merely aimed to give you the benefit of some experience."

"Perhaps you are taking the right course; I rather think you are. Perhaps I prove what a child I am still, because I feel that I should like to have you treat me more as you did when I was learning to walk. Then you stretched out your hands, and sustained me, and showed me step by step. Papa, if this is a mood, and I go back to my old, shallow life, with its motives, its petty and unworthy triumphs, I shall despise myself, and ever have the humiliating consciousness that I am doing what is contemptible. No matter how one obtains the knowledge of a truth or a secret, that knowledge exists, remains, and one can't be the same afterwards. It makes my

cheeks tingle that I obtained my knowledge as I did. It came like a broad glare of garish light, in which I saw myself;" and she told him the circumstances.

He burst into a hearty laugh, and remarked, "Pat did put the ethics of the thing strongly."

"He made 'the thing,' as you call it, odious then and forever. I've been writhing in self-contempt ever since. When to be conventional is to be like a kitchen-maid, and worse, do you wonder at my revolt from the past?"

"Others won't see it in that light, my dear."

"What does it matter how others see it? I have my own life to live, to make or mar. How can I go on hereafter amusing myself in what now seems a vulgar, base, unwomanly way? It was a coarse, rude hand that awakened me, papa, but I am awake. Since I have met you I have had another humiliation. As I said, I am not even acquainted with you. I have never shown any genuine interest in that which makes your life, and you have no more thought of revealing yourself and your work to me than to a child."

"Marian," said her father, slowly, "I think you are not only capable of a change, but ripe for it. You inspire hope within me, and this fact carries with it the assurance that you also inspire respect. No, my dear, you don't know much about me; very few do. No man with a nature like mine reveals himself where there is no desire for the knowledge, no understanding, no sympathy, or even where all these exist, unless prompted by his heart. You know I am the last one in the world to put myself on exhibition. But it would be a heavenly joy to me--I might add surprise--if my own daughter became like some of the women of whom I have read and dreamed; and I do read and dream of that in which you little imagine me to be interested. To the world I am a stern, reticent, practical man I must

be such in my calling. In my home I have tried to be good-natured, affectionate, and philosophical. I have seen little opportunity for anything more. I do not complain, but merely state a fact which indicates the general lot. We can rarely escape the law of heredity, however. A poet and a metaphysician were among our German ancestry; therefore, leading from the business-like and matter-of-fact apartment of my mind, I have a private door by which I can slip away into the realm of speculation, romance, and ideals. You perceive that I have no unnatural or shame-faced reticence about this habit. I tell you of it the moment you show sufficient interest to warrant my speaking."

"But, papa, I cannot hope to approach or even suggest the ideals of your fancy, dressed, no doubt, in mediaeval costume, and talking in blank verse."

"That's a superficial view, Marian. Neither poetic or outlandish costume, nor the impossible language put into the mouths of their creations by the old bards, makes the unconventional woman. There is, in truth, a conventionality about these very things, only it is antiquated. It is not a woman's dress or phraseology that makes her an ideal or an inspiration, but what she is herself. No two leaves are alike on the same tree, but they are all enough alike to make but one impression. Some are more shapely than others, and flutter from their support with a fairer and more conspicuous grace to the closely observant; but there is nothing independent about them, nothing to distinguish them especially from their companions. They fulfil their general purpose, and fall away. This simile applies to the majority of people. Not only poetry and romance, but history also, gives us instances wherein men and women differ and break away from accepted types, some in absurd or grotesque ways, others through the sheer force of gifted selfishness, and others still in natural, noble development of graces of heart and mind."

"Stop generalizing, and tell me, your silly, vain, flirtatious daughter, how I can be unconventional in this prosaic midday of civilization."

"Prosaic day? You are mistaken, Marian. There never was a period like it Barbaric principles, older than Abraham, are now to triumph, or give place to a better and more enlightened human nature. We almost at this moment hear the echoes of a strife in which specimens of the best manhood of the age are arrayed against one another in a struggle such as the world has never witnessed. I have my part in the conflict, and it brings to me great responsibilities and dangers."

"Dangers! You in danger, papa?"

"Yes, certainly. Since you wish to be treated like a woman, and not a child,--since you wish me to show my real life,--you shall know the truth. I am controlled by the government that is engaged in a life-and-death struggle to maintain its own existence and preserve for the nation its heritage of liberty. Thus far I have been able to serve the cause in quiet, unrecognized ways that I need not now explain; but I am one who must obey orders, and I wish to do so, for my heart is in the work. I am no better than other men who are risking all. Mamma knows this in a way, but she does not fully

comprehend it. Fortunately she is not one of those who take very anxious thought for the morrow, and you know I am inclined to let things go on quietly as long as they will. Thus far I have merely gone to an office as I did before the war, or else have been absent on trips that were apparently civilian in character, and it has been essential that I should have as little distraction of mind as possible. I have lived long in hope that some decisive victory might occur; but the future grows darker, instead of lighter, and the struggle, instead of culminating speedily, promises to become more deadly and to be prolonged. There is but one way out of it for me, and that is through the final triumph of the old flag. Therefore, what a day will bring forth God only knows. There have been times when I wished to tell you something of this, but there seemed little opportunity. As you said, a good many were coming and going, you seemed happy and preoccupied, and I got into the habit of reasoning, 'Every day that passes without a thought of trouble is just so much gained; and it may be unnecessary to cloud her life with fear and anxiety;' yet perhaps it would be mistaken kindness to let trouble come suddenly, like an unexpected blow. I confess, however, that I have had a little natural longing to be more to my only child than I apparently was, but each day brought its increasing press of work and responsibility, its perplexing and far-reaching questions. Thus time has passed, and I said, 'Let her be a light-hearted girl as long as she can.'

"O papa, what a blind, heartless fool I've been!"

"No, my dear, only young and thoughtless, like thousands of others. It so happened that nothing occurred to awaken you. One day of your old life begat another. That so slight a thing should make you think, and desire to be different, promises much to me, for if your nature had been shallow and commonplace, you wouldn't have been much disturbed. If you have the spirit your words indicate to-night, it will be better for you to face life in the height and depth of its reality, trusting in God and your own womanhood for strength to meet whatever comes. Those who live on this higher plane have deeper sorrows, but also far richer joys, than those who exist from hand to mouth, as it were, in the immediate and material present. What's more, they cease to be plebeian in the meaner sense of the word, and achieve at one step a higher caste. They have broken the conventional type, and all the possibilities of development open at once. You are still a young, inexperienced girl, and have done little in life except learn your lessons and amuse yourself, yet in your dissatisfaction and aspiration you are almost infinitely removed from what you were yesterday, for you have attained the power to grow and develop."

"You are too philosophical for me. How shall I grow or develop?"

"I scarcely know."

"What definite thing shall I do to-morrow?"

"Do what the plant does. Receive the influence that tends to quicken your best impulses and purposes; follow your awakened conscience naturally. Do what seems to you womanly, right, noble in little things or in great things, should there be opportunity. Did Shakespeare, as a child, propose to write the plays which have made him chief among men? He merely yielded to the impulse when it came. The law

holds good down to you, my little girl. You have an impulse which is akin to that of genius. Instead of continuing your old indolent, strolling gait on the dead level of life, you have left the beaten track and faced the mountain of achievement. Every resolute step forward takes you higher, even though it be but an inch; yet I cannot see the path by which you will climb, or tell you the height you may gain. The main thing is the purpose to ascend. For those bent on noble achievement there is always a path. God only knows to what it may bring you. One step leads to another, and you will be guided better by the instincts and laws of your own nature than if I tried to lead you step by step. The best I can do is to give you a little counsel, and a helping hand now and then, as the occasion requires."

"Now in truth, papa, do not all your fine words signify about what you and mamma used to say years ago,--'You must be a good little girl, and then you will be happy'? It seems to me that many good people are conventionalities themselves."

"Many are, and if they ARE good, it is a fortunate phase of conventionality. For instance, I know of a man who by the law of heredity and the force of circumstances has scarcely a bad habit or trait, and has many good ones. He meets the duties of life in an ordinary, satisfactory way, and with little effort on his part I know of another man who externally presents nearly the same aspect to society, who is quiet and unobtrusive in his daily life, and yet he is fighting hereditary taint and habit with a daily heroism, such as no soldier in the war can surpass. He is not conventional, although he appears to be so. He is a knight who is not afraid to face demons. Genuine strength and originality of character do not consist in saying or doing things in an unusual way. Voluntary eccentrics are even worse than the imitators of some model or the careless souls which take their coloring from chance surroundings. Conventionality ceases when a human being begins the resolute development of his own natural law of growth to the utmost extent. This is true because nature in her higher work is not stereotyped. I will now be as definite as you can desire. You, for instance, Marian Vosburgh, are as yet, even to yourself, an unknown quantity. You scarcely know what you are, much less what you may become. This conversation, and the feeling which led to it, prove this. There are traits and possibilities in your nature due to ancestors of whom you have not even heard. These combine with your own individual endowments by nature to make you a separate and distinct being, and you grow more separate and distinct by developing nature's gifts, traits, powers,--in brief, that which is essentially your own. Thus nature becomes your ally and sees to it with absolute certainty that you are not like other people. Following this principle of action you cannot know, nor can any one know, to just what you may attain. All true growth is from within, outward. In the tree, natural law prevents distortion or exaggeration of one part over another. In your case reason, conscience, good taste, must supervise and direct natural impulses. Thus following nature you become natural, and cease to be conventional. If you don't do this you will be either conventional or queer. Do you understand me?"

"I think I begin to. Let me see if I do. Let me apply your words to one definite problem,--How can I be more helpful and companionable to you?"

"Why, Marian, do you not see how infinitely more to me you are already, although scarcely beyond the wish to be different from what you were? I have talked to you as a man talks to a woman in the dearest and most unselfish relation of life. There is one thing, however, you never can know, and that is a father's love for a daughter: it is essentially a man's love and a man's experience. I am sure it is very different from the affection I should have for a son, did I possess one. Ever since you were a baby the phrase, 'my little girl,' has meant more than you can ever know; and now when you come voluntarily to my side in genuine sympathy, and seek to enter INTELLIGENTLY into that which makes my life, you change everything for the better, precisely as that which was in cold, gray shadow before is changed by sunlight. You add just so much by your young, fresh, womanly life to my life, and it is all the more welcome because it is womanly and different from mine. You cease to be a child, a dependant to be provided for, and become a friend, an inspiration, a confidante. These relations may count little to heavy, stolid, selfish men, to whom eating, drinking, excitement, and money-making are the chief considerations, but to men of mind and ideals, especially to a man who has devoted, his heart, brain, and life to a cause upon which the future of a nation depends, they are pre-eminent. You see I am a German at heart, and must have my world of thought and imagination, as well as the world in which men look at me with cold, hard, and even hostile eyes. Thus far this ideal world has been peopled chiefly by the shadows of those who have lived in the past or by the characters of the great creators in poetry. Now if my blue-eyed daughter can prove to me that she has too much heart and brain to be an ordinary society-girl like half a million of others, and will share my interest in the great thoughts and achievements of the past and the greater questions of to-day,--if she can prove that when I have time I may enjoy a tryst with her in regions far remote from shallow, coarse, commonplace minds,--is not my whole life enriched? We can read some of my favorite authors together and trace their influence on the thought of the world. We can take up history and see how to-day's struggle is the result of the past. I think I could soon give you an intelligent idea of the questions of the time, for which men are hourly dying. The line of battle stretches across the continent, and so many are engaged that every few moments a man, and too often a woman from heart-break, dies that the beloved cause may triumph. Southern girls and women, as a rule, are far more awake to the events of the time than their sisters in the North. Such an influence on the struggle can scarcely be over-estimated. They create a public sentiment that drives even the cowardly into the ranks, and their words and enthusiasm incite brave young men to even chivalric courage. It is true that there are very many like them in the North, but there are also very many who restrain the men over whom they have influence,--who are indifferent, as you have been, or in sympathy with the South,--or who, as is true in most instances, do not yet see the necessity for self-sacrifice. We have not truly felt the war yet, but it will sooner or later come home to every one who has a heart. I have been in the South, and have studied the spirit of the people. They are just as sincere and conscientious as we are, and more in earnest as yet. Christian love and faith, there, look to Heaven for sanction with absolute sincerity, and mothers send their sons, girls their lovers, and wives their husbands, to die if need be. For the political conspirators who have thought first and always of their ambition I have only detestation, but for the people of the South--for the man I may meet in the ranks and kill

if I can--I have profound respect. I should know he was wrong, I should be equally sure that he believed himself right.

"Look at the clock, my dear, and see how long I have talked to you. Can you now doubt that you will be companionable to me? Men down town think I am hard as a rock, but your touch of sympathy has been as potent as the stroke of Moses' rod. You have had an inundation of words, and the future is rosy to me with hope because you are not asleep."

"Have I shown lack of interest, papa?"

"No, Marian, your intent eyes have been eloquent with feeling. Therefore I have spoken so long and fully. You have, as it were, drawn the words from me. You have made this outpouring of my heart seem as natural as breathing, for when you look as you do to-night, I can almost think aloud to you. You have a sympathetic face, my child, and when expressing intelligent sympathy it grows beautiful. It was only pretty before. Prettiness is merely a thing of outline and color; beauty comes from the soul."

She came and stood at his side, resting her arm lightly on his shoulder.

"Papa," she said, "your words are a revelation to me. Your world is indeed a new one, and a better one than mine. But I must cease to be a girl, and become a woman, to enter it."

"You need not be less happy; you do not lose anything. A picture is ever finer for shadows and depth of perspective. You can't get anything very fine, in either art or life, from mere bright surface glare."

"I can't go back to that any more; something in my very soul tells me that I cannot; and your loneliness and danger would render even the wish to do so base. No, I feel now that I would rather be a woman, even though it involves a crown of thorns, than to be a shallow creature that my own heart would despise. I may never be either wise or deep, but I shall be to you all I can."

"You do very much for me in those words alone, my darling. As I said before, no one can tell what you may become if you develop your own nature naturally."

CHAPTER IV.

WOMAN'S CHIEF RIGHT.

It was late when Marian and her father parted, and each felt that a new era had begun in their lives. To the former it was like a deep

religious experience. She was awed and somewhat depressed, as well as resolute and earnest. Life was no pleasure excursion to her father. Questions involving the solemnity of danger, possibly death, occupied his mind. Yet it was not of either that he thought, but of the questions themselves. She saw that he was a large-hearted, large-brained man, who entered into the best spirit of his age, and found recreation in the best thought of the past, and she felt that she was still but a little child beside him.

"But I shall no longer be a silly child or a shallow, selfish, unfeeling girl. I know there is something better in my nature than this. Papa's words confirm what I have read but never thought of much: the chief need of men who can do much or who amount to much is the intelligent sympathy of women who understand and care for them. Why, it was the inspiration of chivalry, even in the dark ages. Well, Marian Vosburgh, if you can't excel a kitchen-maid, it would be better that you had never lived."

The sun was shining brightly when she wakened on the following morning, and when she came to breakfast their domestic handed her a note from her father, by which she was informed that he would dine with her earlier than usual, and that they would take a sail down the bay.

Brief as it was, it breathed an almost lover-like fondness and happiness. She enjoyed her first exultant thrill at her sense of power as she comprehended that he had gone to his work that day a stronger and more hopeful man.

She went out to do her shopping, and was soon in a Broadway temple of fashion, but found that she was no longer a worshipper. A week before the beautiful fabrics would have absorbed her mind and awakened intense desires, for she had a passion for dress, and few knew how to make more of it than she. But a new and stronger passion was awakening. She was made to feel at last that she had not only a woman's lovely form and features, but a woman's mind. Now she began to dream of triumphs through the latter, and her growing thought was how to achieve them. Not that she was indifferent to her costume; it should be like the soldier's accoutrements; her mind the weapon.

As is common with the young to whom any great impulse or new, deep experience comes, she was absorbed by it, and could think of little else. She went over her father's words again and again, dwelling on the last utterance, which had contained the truth uppermost in all that he had said,—"Develop the best in your own nature naturally."

What was her own nature, her starting-point? Her introspection was not very reassuring. She felt that perhaps the most hopeful indication was her strong rebound from what she at last recognized as mean and unworthy. She also had a little natural curiosity and vanity to see if her face was changing with changing motives. Was there such a difference between prettiness and beauty? She was perfectly sure she would rather be beautiful than pretty.

Her mirror revealed a perplexed young face, suggesting interrogation-points. The day was ending as it had begun, with a dissatisfaction as to the past, amounting almost to disgust, and with fears, queries, and uncertainties concerning the future. How should she take up life again? How should she go on with it?

More importunate still was the question, "What has the future in store for me and for those I love? Papa spoke of danger; and when I think of his resolute face, I know that nothing in the line of duty will daunt him. He said that it might not be kindness to leave me in my old, blind, unthinking ignorance,—that a blow, shattering everything, might come, finding us all unprepared. Oh, why don't mamma feel and see more? We have been just like comfortable passengers on a ship, while papa was facing we knew not what. I may not be of much use, but I feel now as if I wanted to be with him. To stay below with scarcely any other motive than to have a good time, and then to be paralyzed, helpless, when some shock of trouble comes, now seems silly and weak to the last degree. I am only too glad that I came to my senses in time, for if anything should happen to papa, and I had to remember all my days that I had never been much to him, and had left him to meet the stress of life and danger alone, I am sure I should be wretched from self-reproach."

When he came at six o'clock, she met him eagerly, and almost her first words were, "Papa, there hasn't been any danger to-day?"

"Oh, no; none at all; only humdrum work. You must not anticipate trouble. Soldiers, you know, jest and laugh even when going into battle, and they are all the better soldiers for the fact. No; I have given you a wrong impression. Nothing has been humdrum to-day. An acquaintance down town said: 'What's up, Vosburgh? Heard good news? Have our troops scored a point?' You see I was so brightened up that he thought nothing but a national victory could account for the improvement. Men are like armies, and are twice as effective when well supported."

"The idea of my supporting you!"

"To me it's a charming idea. Instead of coming back to a dismal, empty house, I find a blue-eyed lassie who will go with me to dinner, and add sauce piquante to every dish. Come, I am not such a dull, grave old fellow as you imagine. You shall see how gallant I can become under provocation. We must make the most of a couple of hours, for that is all that I can give you. No sail to-night, as I had planned, for a government agent is coming on from Washington to see me, and I must be absent for at least an hour or two after eight o'clock. You won't mope, will you? You have something to read? Has the day been very long and lonely? What have you been doing and thinking about?"

"When are you going to give me a chance to answer?"

"Oh, I read your answer, partly at least, in your eyes. You can amplify later. Come, get ready for the street. Put on what you please, so that you wear a smile. These are not times to worry over slight reverses as long as the vital points are safe."

The hour they passed at dinner gave Marian a new revelation of her father. The quiet man proved true the words of Emerson, "Among those who enjoy his thought, he will regain his tongue."

At first he drew her out a little, and with his keen, quick insight he understood her perplexity, her solicitude about him and herself and the future, her resolute purpose to be a woman, and the

difficulties of seeing the way to the changes she desired. Instead of replying directly to her words, he skilfully led their talk to the events of the day, and contemporaneous history became romance under his version; the actors in the passing drama ceased to be names and officials, and were invested with human interest. She was made to see their motives, their hopes, fears, ambitions; she opened her eyes in surprise at his knowledge of prominent people, their social status, relations, and family connection. A genial light of human interest played over most of his words, yet now and then they touched on the depths of tragedy; again he seemed to be indulging in sublimated gossip, and she saw the men and women who posed before the public in their high stations revealed in their actual daily life.

She became so interested that at times she left her food untasted. "How can you know all this?" she exclaimed.

"It is my business to know a great deal," he replied. "Then natural curiosity leads me to learn more. The people of whom I have spoken are the animated pieces on the chess-board. In the tremendous game that we are playing, success depends largely on their strength, weakness, various traits,—in brief, their character. The stake that I have in the game leads me to know and watch those who are exerting a positive influence. It is interesting to study the men and women who, in any period, made and shaped history, and to learn the secrets of their success and failure. Is it not natural that men and women who are making history to-day—who in fact are shaping one's own history—should be objects of stronger attention? Now, as in the past, women exert a far greater influence on current events than you would imagine. There are but few thrones of power behind which you will not find a woman. What I shall do or be during the coming weeks and months depends upon some of the people I have sketched, free-handed, for you alone. You see the sphinx—for as such I am regarded by many—opens his mouth freely to you. Can you guess some of my motives for this kind of talk?"

"You have wanted to entertain me, papa, and you have succeeded. You should write romances, for you but touch the names one sees in the papers and they become dramatic actors."

"I did want to entertain you and make a fair return for your society; I wish to prove that I can be your companion as truly as you can become mine; but I have aimed to do more. I wish you to realize how interesting the larger and higher world of activity is. Do not imagine that in becoming a woman, earnest and thoughtful, you are entering on an era of solemn platitudes. You are rather passing from a theatre of light comedy to a stage from which Shakespeare borrowed the whole gamut of human feeling, passion, and experience. I also wished to satisfy you that you have mind enough to become absorbed as soon as you begin to understand the significance of the play. After you have once become an intelligent spectator of real life you can no more go back to drawing-room chit-chat, gossip, and flirtation than you can lay down Shakespeare's 'Tempest' for a weak little parlor comedy. I am too shrewd a man, Marian, to try to disengage you from the past by exhortations and homilies; and now that you have become my friend, I shall be too sincere with you to disguise my purposes or methods. I propose to co-operate frankly with you in your effort, for in this way I prove my faith in you and my respect for you. Soon you will find yourself

an actor in real life, as well as a spectator."

"I fear I have been one already,--a sorry one, too. It is possible to do mischief without being very intelligent or deliberate. You are making my future, so far as you are concerned, clearer than I imagined it could be. You do interest me deeply. In one evening you make it evident how much I have lost in neglecting you--for I have neglected you, though not intentionally. Hereafter I shall be only too proud if you will talk to me as you have done, giving me glimpses of your thoughts, your work, and especially your dangers, where there are any. Never deceive me in this respect, or leave me in ignorance. Whatever may be the weaknesses of my nature, now that I have waked up, I am too proud a girl to receive all that I do from your hands and then give almost my whole life and thought to others. I shall be too delighted if you are happier for my meddling and dropping down upon you. I'll keep your secrets too, you see;" and she confirmed her words by an emphatic little nod. "You can talk to me about people, big and little, with whom you have to do, just as serenely as if you were giving your confidence to an oyster.

"But, papa, I am confronted by a question of real life, just as difficult for me as any that can perplex you. I can't treat this question any more as I have done. I don't see my way at all. Now I am going to be as direct and straightforward as a man, and not beat around the bush with any womanish finesse. There is a gentleman in this city who, if he knew I was in town to-night, would call, and I might not be able to prevent him from making a formal proposal. He is a man whom I respect and like very much, and I fear I have been too encouraging,--not intentionally and deliberately you know, but thoughtlessly. He was the cleverest and the most entertaining of my friends, and always brought a breezy kind of excitement with him. Don't you see, papa? That is what I lived for, pleasure and excitement, and I don't believe that anything can be so exciting to a girl as to see a man yielding to her fascinations, whatever they may be. It gives one a delicious sense of power. I shall be frank, too. I must be, for I want your advice. You men like power. History is full of the records of those who sold their own souls for it, and walked through blood and crime to reach it. I think it is just as natural for a woman to love power also, only now I see that it is a cruel and vile thing to get it and use it merely for amusement. To me it was excitement. I don't like to think how it may all end to a man like Fenton Lane, and I am so remorseful that I am half inclined to sacrifice myself and make him as good a wife as I can."

"Do you love him?"

"No. I don't think I know what love is. When a mere girl I had a foolish little flame that went out with the first breath of ridicule. Since that time I have enjoyed gentlemen's society as naturally as any other girl of our set, perhaps more keenly. Their talk and ways are so different from those of girls! Then my love of power came in, you see. The other girls were always talking about their friends and followers, and it was my pride to surpass them all. I liked one better than another, of course, but was always as ready for a new conquest as that old fool, 'Alexander the Little,' who ran over the world and especially himself. What do you think, papa? Shall I ever see one who will make all the others appear as

nothing? Or, would it be nobler to devote myself to a true, fine man, like Mr. Lane, no matter how I felt?"

"God forbid! You had better stay at your mother's side till you are as old and wrinkled as Time himself."

"I am honestly glad to hear you say so. But what am I to do? Sooner or later I shall have to refuse Mr. Lane, and others too."

"Refuse them, then. He would be less than a man who would ask a girl to sacrifice herself for him. No, my dear, the most inalienable right of your womanhood is to love freely and give yourself where you love. This right is one of the issues of this war,--that the poorest woman in this land may choose her own mate. Slavery is the corner-stone of the Confederacy, wherein millions of women can be given according to the will of masters. Should the South triumph, phases of the Old-World despotism would creep in with certainty, and in the end we should have alliances, not marriages, as is the case so generally abroad. Now if a white American girl does not make her own choice she is a weak fool. The law and public sentiment protect her. If she will not choose wisely, she must suffer the consequences, and only under the impulse of love can a true choice be made. A girl must be sadly deficient in sense if she loves a weak, bad, disreputable man, or a vulgar, ignorant one. Such mesalliances are more in seeming than in reality, for the girl herself is usually near in nature to what she chooses. There are few things that I would more earnestly guard you against than a loveless marriage. You would probably miss the sweetest happiness of life, and you would scarcely escape one of its worst miseries."

"That settles it, then. I am going to choose for myself,--to stay with you and mamma, and to continue sending you my bills indefinitely."

"They will be love letters, now."

"Very dear ones, you will think sometimes. But truly, papa, you must not let me spend more than you can afford. You should be frank on this point also, when you know I do not wish to be inconsiderate. The question still remains, What am I to do with Mr. Lane?"

"Now I shall throw you on your own resources. I believe your woman's tact can manage this question better than my reason; only, if you don't love him and do not think you can, be sure to refuse him. I have nothing against Mr. Lane, and approve of what I know about him; but I am not eager to have a rival, or to lose what I have so recently gained. Nevertheless, I know that when the true knight comes through the wood, my sleeping beauty will have another awakening, compared with which this one will seem slight indeed. Then, as a matter of course, I will quietly take my place as 'second fiddle' in the harmony of your life. But no discordant first fiddle, if you please; and love alone can attune its strings. My time is up, and, if I don't return early, go to bed, so that mamma may not say you are the worse for your days in town. This visit has made me wish for many others."

"You shall have them, for, as Shakespeare says, your wish 'jumps' with mine."

CHAPTER V.

"BE HOPEFUL, THAT I MAY HOPE."

LEFT to herself Marian soon threw down the book she tried to read, and thought grew busy with her father's later words. Was there then a knight--a man--somewhere in the world, so unknown to her that she would pass him in the street without the slightest premonition that he was the arbiter of her destiny? Was there some one, to whom imagination could scarcely give shadowy outline, so real and strong that he could look a new life into her soul, set all her nerves tingling, and her blood coursing in mad torrents through her veins? Was there a stranger, whom now she would sweep with a casual glance, who still had the power to subdue her proud maidenhood, overcome the reserve which seemed to reach as high as heaven, and lay a gentle yet resistless grasp, not only on her sacred form, but on her very soul? Even the thought made her tremble with a vague yet delicious dread. Then she sprung to her feet and threw back her head proudly as she uttered aloud the words, "If this can ever be true, my power shall be equal to his."

A moment later she was evoking half-exultant chords from the piano. These soon grew low and dreamy, and the girl said softly to herself: "I have lived more in two days than in months of the past. Truly real life is better than a sham, shallow existence."

The door-bell rang, and she started to her feet. "Who can know I am in town?" she queried.

Fenton Lane entered with extended hand and the words: "I was passing and knew I could not be mistaken in your touch. Your presence was revealed by the music as unmistakably as if I had met you on the street. Am I an intruder? Please don't order me away under an hour or two."

"Indeed, Mr. Lane, truth compels me to say that I am here in deep retirement. I have been contemplating a convent."

"May I ask your motive?"

"To repent of my sins."

"You would have to confess at a convent. Why not imagine me a venerable father, dozing after a good dinner, and make your first essay at the confessional?"

"You tax my imagination too greatly. So I should have to confess; therefore no convent for me."

"Of course not. I should protest against it at the very altar, and

in the teeth of the Pope himself. Can't you repent of your sins in some other way?"

"I suppose I shall have to."

"They would be a queer lot of little peccadilloes. I should like to set them all under a microscope."

"I would rather that your glass should be a goblet brimmed from Lethe."

"There is no Lethe for me, Miss Marian, so far as you are concerned."

"Come, tell me the news from the seat of war," she said, abruptly.

"This luxurious arm-chair is not a seat of war."

"Papa has been telling me how Southern girls make all the men enlist."

"I'll enlist to-morrow, if you ask me to."

"Oh, no. You might be shot, and then you would haunt me all my life."

"May I not haunt you anyway?" said Lane, resolutely, for he had determined not to let this opportunity pass. She was alone, and he would confirm the hope which her manner for months had inspired. "Come, Miss Marian," he continued, springing to his feet and approaching her side, his dark eyes full of fire and entreaty; "you cannot have misunderstood me. You know that while not a soldier I am also not a carpet-knight and have not idled in ladies' bowers. I have worked hard and dreamed of you. I am willing to do all that a man can to win you. Cowardice has not kept me from the war, but you. If it would please you I would put on the blue and shoulder a musket to-morrow. If you will permit more discretion and time, I can soon obtain a commission as an officer. But before I fight other battles, I wish to win the supreme victory of my life. Whatever orders I may take from others, you shall ever be my superior officer. You have seen this a long time; a woman of your mind could not help it. I have tried to hope with all a lover's fondness that you gave me glimpses of your heart also, but of this nothing would satisfy a man of my nature but absolute assurance."

He stood proudly yet humbly before her, speaking with strong, impassioned, fluent utterance, for he was a man who had both the power and the habit of expression.

She listened with something like dismay. Her heart, instead of kindling, grew only more heavy and remorseful. Her whole nature shrunk, while pity and compunction wrung tears from her eyes. This was real life in very truth. Here was a man ready to give up safe, luxurious existence, a career already successful, and face death for her. She knew him well enough to be sure that if he could wear her colors he would march away with the first regiment that would receive him. He was not a man to be influenced by little things, but yielded absolutely to the supreme impulses of his life. If she said the word, he would make good his promise with chivalrous, straightforward promptness, facing death, and all that death could

then mean to him, with a light, half-jaunty courage characteristic of the ideal soldier. She had a secret wonder at herself that she could know all this and yet be so vividly conscious that what he asked could never be. Her womanly pity said yes; her woman's heart said no. He was eager to take her in his arms, to place the kiss of life-long loyalty on her lips; but in her very soul she felt that it would be almost sacrilege for him to touch her; since the divine impulse to yield, without which there can be no divine sanction, was absent.

She listened, not as a confused, frightened girl, while he spoke that which she had guessed before. Other men had sued, although none had spoken so eloquently or backed their words by such weight of character. Her trouble, her deep perplexity, was not due to a mere declaration, but was caused by her inability to answer him. The conventional words which she would have spoken a few days before died on her lips. They would be an insult to this earnest man, who had the right to hope for something better. What was scarcely worse--for there are few emergencies in which egotism is wholly lost--she would appear at once to him and to herself in an odious light. Her course would be well characterized by the Irish servant's lover, for here was a man who from the very fineness of his nature, if wronged, might easily go to the devil.

His words echoed her thought, for her hesitation and the visible distress on her face led him to exclaim, in a voice tense with something like agony: "O Marian, since you hesitate, hesitate longer. Think well before you mar--nay, spoil--my life. For God's sake don't put me off with some of the sham conventionalities current with society girls. I could stand anything better than that. I am in earnest; I have always been in earnest; and I saw from the first, through all your light, graceful disguises, that you were not a shallow, brainless, heartless creature,--that a noble woman was waiting to be wakened in your nature. Give me time; give yourself time. This is not a little affair that can be rounded off according to the present code of etiquette; it is a matter of life or death to me. Be more merciful than a rebel bullet."

She buried her face in her hands and sobbed helplessly.

He was capable of feeling unknown depths of tenderness, but there was little softness in his nature. As he looked down upon her, his face grew rigid and stern. In her sobs he read his answer,--the unwillingness, probably the inability, of her heart to respond to his,--and he grew bitter as he thought of the past.

With the cold, quiet tones of one too strong, controlled, and well-bred to give way violently to his intense anger, he said: "This is a different result from what you led me to expect. All your smiles end in these unavailing tears. Why did you smile so sweetly after you understood me, since you had nothing better in store? I was giving you the homage, the choice of my whole manhood, and you knew it. What were you giving me? Why did your eyes draw out my heart and soul? Do you think that such a man as I can exist without heart and soul? Did you class me with Strahan, who can take a refusal as he would lose a game of whist? No, you did not. I saw in your very eyes a true estimate of Strahan and all his kind. Was it your purpose to win a genuine triumph over a man who cared nothing for other women? Why then don't you enjoy it? You

could not ask for anything more complete."

"Trample on me--I deserve it," she faltered.

After a moment's pause, he resumed: "I have no wish to trample on you. I came here with as much loyalty and homage as ever a man brought to a woman in any age. I have offered you any test of my love and truth that you might ask. What more could a man do? As soon as I knew what you were to me, I sought your father's permission to win you, and I told you my secret in every tone and glance. If your whole nature shrunk from me, as I see it does, you could have told me the truth months since, and I should have gone away honoring you as a true-hearted, honest girl, who would scorn the thought of deceiving and misleading an earnest man. You knew I did not belong to the male-flirt genus. When a man from some sacred impulse of his nature would give his very life to make a woman happy, is it too much to ask that she should not deliberately, and for mere amusement, wreck his life? If she does not want his priceless gift, a woman with your tact could have revealed the truth by one glance, by one inflection of a tone. Not that I should have been discouraged so easily, but I should have accepted an unspoken negative long since with absolute respect. But now--" and he made a gesture eloquent with protest and despair.

"But now," she said, wearily, "I see it all in the light in which you put it. Be content; you have spoiled my life as truly as I have yours."

"Yes, for this evening. There will be only one less in your drawing-room when you return."

"Very well," she replied, quietly. Her eyes were dry and hot now, and he could almost see the dark lines deepening under them, and the increasing pallor of her face. "I have only this to say. I now feel that your words are like blows, and they are given to one who is not resisting, who is prostrate;" and she rose as if to indicate that their interview should end.

He looked at her uneasily as she stood before him, with her pallid face averted, and every line of her drooping form suggesting defeat rather than triumph; yes, far more than defeat--the apathetic hopelessness of one who feels himself mortally wounded.

"Will you please tell me just what you mean when you say I have spoiled your life?" he asked.

"How should I know? How should anyone know till he has lived out its bitterness? What do you mean by the words? Perhaps you will remember hereafter that your language has been inconsistent as well as merciless. You said I was neither brainless nor heartless; then added that you had spoiled my life merely for one evening. But there is no use in trying to defend myself: I should have little to urge except thoughtlessness, custom, the absence of evil intention,--other words should prove myself a fool, to avoid being a criminal. Go on and spoil your life; you seem to be wholly bent upon it. Face rebel bullets or do some other reckless thing. I only wish to give you the solace of knowing that you have made me as miserable as a girl can be, and that too at a moment when I was awakening to better things. But I am wasting your valuable time.

You believe in your heart that Mr. Strahan can console me with his gossip to-morrow evening, whatever happens."

"Great God! what am I to believe?"

She turned slowly towards him and said, gravely: "Do not use that name, Mr. Lane. He recognizes the possibility of good in the weakest and most unworthy of His creatures. He never denounces those who admit their sin and would turn from it."

He sprung to her side and took her hand. "Look at me," he pleaded.

His face was so lined and eloquent with suffering that her own lip quivered.

"Mr. Lane," she said, "I have wronged you. I am very sorry now. I've been sorry ever since I began to think--since you last called. I wish you could forgive me. I think it would be better for us both if you could forgive me."

He sunk into a chair and burying his face in his hands groaned aloud; then, in bitter soliloquy, said: "O God! I was right--I knew I was not deceived. She is just the woman I believed her to be. Oh, this is worse than death!"

No tears came into his eyes, but a convulsive shudder ran through his frame like that of a man who recoils from the worst blow of fate.

"Reproach--strike me, even," she cried. "Anything is better than this. Oh, that I could--but how can I? Oh, what an unutterable fool I have been! If your love is so strong, it should also be a little generous. As a woman I appeal to you."

He rose at once and said: "Forgive me; I fear that I have been almost insane,--that I have much to atone for."

"O Mr. Lane, I entreat you to forgive me. I did admire you; I was proud of your preference,--proud that one so highly thought of and coveted by others should single me out. I never dreamt that my vanity and thoughtlessness could lead to this. If you had been ill or in trouble, you would have had my honest sympathy, and few could have sacrificed more to aid you. I never harbored one thought of cold-blooded malice. Why must I be punished as if I had committed a deliberate crime? If I am the girl you believe me to be, what greater punishment could I have than to know that I had harmed a man like you? It seems to me that if I loved any one I could suffer for him and help him, without asking anything in return. I could give you honest friendship, and take heart-felt delight in every manly success that you achieved. As a weak, faulty girl, who yet wishes to be a true woman, I appeal to you. Be strong, that I may be strong; be hopeful, that I may hope; be all that you can be, that I may not be disheartened on the very threshold of the better life I had chosen."

He took her hand, and said: "I am not unresponsive to your words. I feel their full force, and hope to prove that I do; but there is a tenacity in my nature that I cannot overcome. You said, 'if you loved'--do you not love any one?"

"No. You are more to me--twice more--than any man except my father."

"Then, think well. Do not answer me now, unless you must. Is there not a chance for me? I am not a shadow of a man, Marian. I fear I have proved too well how strong and concentrated my nature is. There is nothing I would not do or dare--"

"No, Mr. Lane; no," she interrupted, shaking her head sadly, "I will never consciously mislead a man again a single moment. I scarcely know what love is; I may never know; but until my heart prompts me, I shall never give the faintest hope or encouragement of this nature. I have been taught the evil of it too bitterly."

"And I have been your remorseless teacher, and thus perhaps have destroyed my one chance."

"You are wrong. I now see that your words were natural to one like you, and they were unjust only because I was not deliberate. Mr. Lane, let me be your friend. I could give you almost a sister's love; I could be so proud of you!"

"There," he said. "You have triumphed after all. I pledge you my word--all the manhood I possess--I will do whatever you ask."

She took his hand in both her own with a look of gratitude he never forgot, and spoke gladly: "Now you change everything. Oh, I am so glad you did not go away before! What a sad, sleepless night I should have had, and sad to-morrows stretching on indefinitely! I ask very much, very much indeed,--that you make the most and best of yourself. Then I can try to do the same. It will be harder for you than for me. You bring me more hope than sadness; I have given you more sadness than hope. Yet I have absolute faith in you because of what papa said to me last night. I had asked him how I could cease to be what I was, be different, you know, and he said, 'Develop the best in your own nature naturally.' If you will do this I shall have no fears."

"Yet I have been positively brutal to you to-night."

"No man can be so strong as you are and be trifled with. I understand that now, Mr. Lane. You had no sentimentality to be touched, and my tears did not move you in the least until you believed in my honest contrition."

"I have revealed to you one of my weaknesses. I am rarely angry, but when I am, my passion, after it is over, frightens me. Marian, you do forgive me in the very depths of your heart?"

"I do indeed,--that is, if I have anything to forgive under the circumstances."

"Poor little girl! how pale you are! I fear you are ill."

"I shall soon be better,--better all my life for your forgiveness and promise."

"Thank God that we are parting in this manner," he said. "I don't like to think of what might have happened, for I was in the devil's

own mood. Marian, if you make good the words you have spoken to-night, if you become the woman you can be, you will have a power possessed by few. It was not your beauty merely that fascinated me, but a certain individuality,--something all your own, which gives you an influence apparently absolute. But I shall speak no more in this strain. I shall try to be as true a friend as I am capable of becoming, although an absent one. I must prove myself by deeds, not words, however. May I write to you sometimes? I will direct my letters under the care of your father, and you may show them to him or your mother, as you wish."

"Certainly you may, and you will be my first and only gentleman correspondent. After what has passed between us, it would be prudery to refuse. Moreover, I wish to hear often of your welfare. Never for a moment will my warm interest cease, and you can see me whenever you wish. I have one more thing to ask,--please take up your old life to-morrow, just where you left off. Do nothing hastily, or from impulse. Remember you have promised to make the most and best of yourself, and that requires you to give conscience and reason fair hearing. Will you also promise this?"

"Anything you asked, I said."

"Then good-by. Never doubt my friendship, as I shall not doubt yours."

Her hand ached from the pressure of his, but the pain was thus drawn from her heart.

CHAPTER VI.

A SCHEME OF LIFE.

MARIAN waited for her father's return, having been much too deeply excited for the speedy advent of quiet sleep. When at last he came she told him everything. As she described the first part of the interview his brow darkened, but his face softened as she drew toward the close. When she ceased he said:--

"Don't you see I was right in saying that your own tact would guide you better than my reason? If I, instead of your own nature, had directed you, we should have made an awful mess of it. Now let me think a moment. This young fellow has suggested an idea to me,--a general line of action which I think you can carry out. There is nothing like a good definite plan,--not cast-iron, you know, but flexible and modified by circumstances as you go along, yet so clear and defined as to give you something to aim at. Confound it, that's what's the matter with our military authorities. If McClellan is a ditch-digger let them put a general in command; or, if he is a general, give him what he wants and let him alone. There is

no head, no plan. I confess, however, that just now I am chiefly interested in your campaigns, which, after all, stand the best chance of bringing about union, in spite of your negative mood manifested to-night. Nature will prove too strong for you, and some day--soon probably--you will conquer, only to surrender yourself. Be that as it may, the plan I suggest need not be interfered with. Be patient. I'm only following the tactics in vogue,--taking the longest way around to the point to be attacked. Lane said that if you carried out your present principle of action you would have a power possessed by few. I think he is right. I'm not flattering you. Little power of any kind can co-exist with vanity. The secret of your fascination is chiefly in your individuality. There are other girls more beautiful and accomplished who have not a tithe of it. Now and then a woman is peculiarly gifted with the power to influence men,--strong men, too. You had this potency in no slight degree when neither your heart nor your brain was very active. You will find that it will increase with time, and if you are wise it will be greater when you are sixty than at present. If you avoid the Scylla of vanity on the one hand, and the Charybdis of selfishness on the other, and if the sympathies of your heart keep pace with a cultivated mind, you will steadily grow in social influence. I believe it for this reason: A weak girl would have been sentimental with Lane, would have yielded temporarily, either to his entreaty or to his anger, only to disappoint him in the end, or else would have been conventional in her refusal and so sent him to the bad, probably. You recognized just what you could be to him, and had the skill--nature, rather, for all was unpremeditated--to obtain an influence by which you can incite him to a better manhood and a greater success, perhaps, than if he were your accepted lover. Forgive this long preamble: I am thinking aloud and feeling my way, as it were. What did you ask him to promise? Why, to make the most and best of himself. Why not let this sentence suggest the social scheme of your life? Drop fellows who have neither brains nor heart,--no good mettle in them,--and so far as you have influence strive to inspire the others to make the most and best of themselves. You would not find the kitchen-maid a rival on this plan of life; nor indeed, I regret to say, many of your natural associates. Outwardly your life will appear much the same, but your motive will change everything, and flow through all your action like a mountain spring, rendering it impossible for you to poison any life."

"O papa, the very possibility of what you suggest makes life appear beautiful. The idea of a convent!"

"Convents are the final triumph of idiocy. If bad women could be shut up and made to say prayers most of the time, no harm at least would be done,--the good, problematical; but to immure a woman of sweet, natural, God-bestowed impulses is the devil's worst practical joke in this world. Come, little girl, it's late. Think over the scheme; try it as you have a chance; use your power to incite men to make the most and best of themselves. This is better than levying your little tribute of flattery and attention, like other belles,--a phase of life as common as cobble-stones and as old as vanity. For instance, you have an artist among your friends. Possibly you can make him a better artist and a better fellow in every way. Drop all muffs and sticks; don't waste yourself on them. Have considerable charity for some of the wild fellows, none for their folly, and from the start tolerate no tendencies toward sentimentality. You will find that the men who admire girls bent on making eyes rather than

making men will soon disappear. Sensible fellows won't misunderstand you, even though prompted to more than friendship; and you will have a circle of friends of which any woman might be proud. Of course you will find at times that unspoken negatives will not satisfy; but if a woman has tact, good sense, and sincerity, her position is impregnable. As long as she is not inclined to love a man herself, she can, by a mere glance, not only define her position, but defend it. By simple dignity and reserve she can say to all, 'Thus far and no farther.' If, without encouragement, any one seeks to break through this barrier he meets a quiet negative which he must respect, and in his heart does respect. Now, little girl, to sum up your visit, with its long talks and their dramatic and unexpected illustration, I see nothing to prevent you from going forward and making the best and most of your life according to nature and truth. You have a good start, and a rather better chance than falls to the lot of the majority."

"Truly," said Marian, thoughtfully, "we don't appear to grow old and change by time so much as by what happens,—by what we think and feel. Everything appears changed, including you and myself."

"It's more in appearance than in reality. You will find the impetus of your old life so strong that it will be hard even to change the direction of the current. You will be much the same outwardly, as I said before. The stream will flow through the same channel of characteristic traits and habits. The vital change must be in the stream itself,—the motive from which life springs."

How true her father's words seemed on the following evening after her return! Her mother, as she sat down, to their dainty little dinner, looked as if her serenity had been undisturbed by a single perplexing thought during the past few days. There was the same elegant, yet rather youthful costume for a lady of her years; the same smiling face, not yet so full in its outline as to have lost all its girlish beauty. It was marred by few evidences of care and trouble, nor was it spiritualized by thought or deep experience.

Marian observed her closely, not with any disposition towards cold or conscious criticism, but in order that she might better understand the conditions of her own life. She also had a wakening curiosity to know just what her mother was to her father and he to her. The hope was forming that she could make them more to each other. She had too much tact to believe that this could be done by general exhortations. If anything was to be accomplished it must be by methods so fine and unobtrusive as to be scarcely recognized.

Her father's inner life had been a revelation to her, and she was led to query: "Why does not mamma understand it? CAN she understand it?" Therefore she listened attentively to the details of what had happened in her absence. She waited in vain for any searching and intelligent questions concerning the absent husband. Beyond that he was well, and that everything about the house was just as she had left it, Mrs. Vosburgh appeared to have no interest. She was voluble over little household affairs, the novel that just then absorbed her, and especially the callers and their chagrin at finding the young girl absent.

"Only the millionaire widower remained any length of time when learning that you were away," said the lady, "and he spent most of

the evening with me. I assure you he is a very nice, entertaining old fellow."

"How did he entertain you? What did he talk about?"

"Let me remember. Now I think of it, what didn't he talk about? He is one of the most agreeable gossips I ever met,--knows everybody and everything. He has at his finger-ends the history of all who were belles in my time, and" (complacently) "I find that few have done better than I, while some, with all their opportunities, chose very crooked sticks."

"You are right, mamma. It seems to me that neither of us half appreciates papa. He works right on so quietly and steadily, and yet he is not a machine, but a man."

"Oh, I appreciate him. Nine out of ten that he might have married would have made him no end of trouble. I don't make him any. Well, after talking about the people we used to know, Mr. Lanniere began a tirade against the times and the war, which he says have cost him a hundred thousand dollars; but he took care in a quiet way to let me know that he has a good many hundred thousands left. I declare, Marian, you might do a great deal worse."

"Do you not think I might do a great deal better?" the young girl asked, with a frown.

"I have no doubt you think so. Girls will be romantic. I was, myself; but as one goes on in life one finds that a million, more or less, is a very comfortable fact. Mr. Lanniere has a fine house in town, but he's a great traveller, and an habitue of the best hotels of this country and Europe. You could see the world with him on its golden side."

"Well, mamma, I want a man,--not an habitue. What's more, I must be in love with the man, or he won't stand the ghost of a chance. So you see the prospects are that you will have me on your hands indefinitely. Mr. Lanniere, indeed! What should I be but a part of his possessions,--another expensive luxury in his luxurious life? I want a man like papa,--earnest, large-brained, and large-hearted,--who, instead of inveighing against the times, is absorbed in the vital questions of the day, and is doing his part to solve them rightly. I would like to take Mr. Lanniere into a military hospital or cemetery, and show him what the war has cost other men."

"Why, Marian, how you talk!"

"I wish I could make you know how I feel. It seems to me that one has only to think a little and look around in order to feel deeply. I read of an awful battle while coming up in the cars. We have been promised, all the spring, that Richmond would be taken, the war ended, and all go on serenely again; but it doesn't look like it."

"What's the use of women distressing themselves with such things?" said Mrs. Vosburgh, irritably. "I can't bear to think of war and its horrors, except as they give spice to a story. Our whole trouble is a big political squabble, and you know I detest politics. It is just as Mr. Lanniere says,--if our people had only let slavery

alone all would have gone on veil. The leaders on both sides will find out before the summer is over that they have gone too far and fast, and they had better settle their differences with words rather than blows. We shall all be shaking hands and making up before Christmas."

"Papa doesn't think so."

"Your father is a German at heart. He has the sense to be practical about every-day affairs and enjoy a good dinner, but he amuses himself with cloudy speculations and ideals and vast questions about the welfare of the world, or the 'trend of the centuries,' as he said one day to me. I always try to laugh him out of such vague nonsense. Has he been talking to you about the 'trend of the centuries'?"

"No, mamma, he has not," replied Marian, gravely; "but if he does I shall try to understand what he means and be interested. I know that papa feels deeply about the war, and means to take the most effective part in it that he can, and that he does not think it will end so easily as you believe. These facts make me feel anxious, for I know how resolute papa is."

"He has no right to take any risks," said the lady, emphatically.

"He surely has the same right that other men have."

"Oh, well," concluded Mrs. Vosburgh, with a shrug, "there is no use in borrowing trouble. When it comes to acting, instead of dreaming and speculating on vast, misty questions, I can always talk your father into good sense. That is the best thing about him,--he is well-balanced, in spite of his tendency to theories. When I show him that a thing is quixotic he laughs, shrugs his shoulders, and good-naturedly goes on in the even tenor of his way. It was the luckiest thing in the world for him when he married me, for I soon learned his weak points, and have ever guarded him against them. As a result he has had a quiet, prosperous career. If he wishes to serve the government in some civilian capacity, and is well paid for it, why shouldn't he? But I would never hear of his going to the front, fighting, and marching in Virginia mud and swamps. If he ever breathes such a thought to you, I hope you will aid me in showing him how cruel and preposterous it is."

Marian sighed, as she thought: "I now begin to see how well papa understands mamma, but has she any gauge by which to measure him? I fear he has found his home lonely, in spite of good dinners."

"Come, my dear," resumed Mrs. Vosburgh, "we are lingering too long. Some of your friends may be calling soon, although I said I did not know whether you would be at home to-night or not. Mr. Lanniere will be very likely to come, for I am satisfied that he has serious intentions. What's more, you might do worse,--a great deal worse."

"Three times you have said that, mamma, and I don't like it," said Marian, a little indignantly. "Of course I might do worse; I might kill him, and I should be tempted to if I married him. You know that I do not care for him, and he knows it, too. Indeed, I scarcely respect him. You don't realize what you are saying, for you would not have me act from purely mercenary motives?"

"Oh, certainly not; but Mr. Lanniere is not a monster or a decrepit centenarian. He is still in his prime, and is a very agreeable and accomplished man of the world. He is well-connected, moves in the best society, and could give his wife everything."

"He couldn't give me happiness, and he would spoil my life."

"Oh well, if you feel so, there is nothing more to be said. I can tell you, though, that multitudes of girls would be glad of your chance; but, like so many young people, you have romantic ideas, and do not appreciate the fact that happiness results chiefly from the conditions of our lot, and that we soon learn to have plenty of affection for those who make them all we could desire;" and she touched a bell for the waitress, who had been temporarily dismissed.

The girl came in with a faint smile on her face. "Has she been listening?" thought Marian. "That creature, then, with her vain, pretty, yet vulgar face, is the type of what I was. She has been lighting the drawing-room for me to do what she proposes to do later in the evening. She looks just the same. Mamma is just the same. Callers will come just the same. How unchanged all is, as papa said it would be! I fear much may be unchangeable."

She soon left the dining-room for the parlor, her dainty, merry little campaigning-ground. What should be its future record? Could she carry out the scheme of life which her father had suggested? "Well," she concluded, with an ominous flash in her eyes at her fair reflection in the mirror, "whether I can incite any one to better things or not, I can at least do some freezing out. That gossipy, selfish old Mr. Lanniere must take his million to some other market. I have no room in my life for him. Neither do I dote on the future acquaintance of Mr. Strahan. I shall put him on probation. If men don't want my society and regard on the new conditions, they can stay away; if they persist in coming, they must do something finer and be something finer than in the past. The friendship of one man like Fenton Lane is worth more than the attention of a wilderness of muffs and sticks, as papa calls them. What I fear is that I shall appear goody-goody, and that would disgust every one, including myself."

CHAPTER VII.

SURPRISES.

MR. Lanniere evidently had serious intentions, for he came unfashionably early. He fairly beamed on the young girl when he found her at home. Indeed, as she stood before him in her radiant youth, which her evening costume enhanced with a fine taste quickly recognized by his practised eyes, he very justly regarded her as

better than anything which his million had purchased hitherto. It might easily be imagined that he had added a little to the couleur de rose of the future by an extra glass of Burgundy, for he positively appeared to exude an atmosphere of affluence, complacency, and gracious intention. The quick-witted girl detected at once his King-Cophetua air, and she was more amused than embarrassed. Then the eager face of Fenton Lane arose in her fancy, and she heard his words, "I would shoulder a musket and march away to-morrow if you bade me!" How insignificant was all that this man could offer, as compared with the boundless, self-sacrificing love of the other, before whom her heart bowed in sincere homage if nothing more! What was this man's offer but an expression of selfishness? And what could she ever be but an accessory of his Burgundy? Indeed, as his eyes, humid from wine, gloated upon her, and he was phrasing his well-bred social platitudes and compliments, quite oblivious of the fact that HER eyes were taking on the blue of a winter sky, her cheeks began to grow a little hot with indignation and shame. He knew that she did not love him, that naturally she could not, and that there had been nothing in their past relations to inspire even gratitude and respect towards him. In truth, his only effort had been to show his preference and to indicate his wishes. What then could his offer mean but the expectation that she would take him as a good bargain, and, like any well-bred woman of the world, comply with all its conditions? Had she given him the impression that she could do this? While the possibility made her self-reproachful, she was conscious of rising resentment towards him who was so complacently assuming that she was for sale.

"Indeed, Miss Vosburgh," was the conclusion of his rather long preliminaries, "you must not run away soon again. June days may be charming under any circumstances, but your absence certainly insures dull June evenings."

"You are burdening your conscience without deceiving me," the young girl replied, demurely, "and should not so wrong yourself. Mamma said that you were very entertaining, and that last evening was a delightful one. It could scarcely be otherwise. It is natural that people of the same age should be congenial. I will call mamma at once."

"I beg you will not,—at least not just yet. I have something to say to which I trust you will listen kindly and favorably. Do you think me so very old?"

"No older than you have a perfect right to be, Mr. Lanniere," said the girl, laughing. "I can think of no reason for your reproachful tone."

"Let me give you one then. Your opinions are of immense importance to me."

"Truly, Mr. Lanniere, this is strange beyond measure, especially as I am too young to have formed many opinions."

"That fact only increases my admiration and regard. One must reach my years in order to appreciate truly the dewy freshness of youth. The world is a terra incognita to you yet, and your opinions of life are still to be formed. Let me give you a chance to see the world from lofty, sunny elevations."

"I am too recently from my geography not to remember that while elevations may be sunny they are very cold," was the reply, with a charming little shiver. "Mont Blanc has too much perspective."

"Do not jest with me or misunderstand me, Miss Vosburgh," he said, impressively. "There is a happy mean in all things."

"Yes, Mr. Lanniere, and the girl who means to be happy should take care to discover it."

"May it not be discovered for her by one who is better acquainted with life? In woman's experience is not happiness more often thrust upon her than achieved? I, who know the world and the rich pleasures and triumphs it affords to one who, in the military phrase of the day, is well supported, can offer you a great deal,--more than most men, I assure you."

"Why, Mr. Lanniere," said the young girl, looking at him with demure surprise, "I am perfectly contented and happy. No ambition for triumphs is consuming me. What triumphs? As for pleasure, each day brings all and more than I deserve. Young as one may be, one can scarcely act without a motive."

"Then I am personally nothing to you?" he said stiffly, and rising.

"Pardon me, Mr. Lanniere. I hope my simple directness may not appear childish, but it seems to me that I have met your suggestions with natural answers; What should you be to me but an agreeable friend of mamma's?"

He understood her fence perfectly, and was aware that the absence of a mercenary spirit on her part made his suit appear almost ridiculous. If her clear young eyes would not see him through a golden halo, but only as a man and a possible mate, what could he be to her? Even gold-fed egotism could not blind him to the truth that she was looking at HIM, and that the thought of bartering herself for a little more of what she had to her heart's content already was not even considered. There was distressing keenness in the suggestion that, not wanting the extraneous things he offered, no motive was left. He was scarcely capable of suspecting her indignation that he should deem her capable of sacrificing her fair young girlhood for greater wealth and luxury, even had she coveted them,--an indignation enhanced by her new impulses. The triumphs, happiness, and power which she now was bent on achieving could never be won under the dense shade of his opulent selfishness. He embodied all that was inimical to her hopes and plans, all that was opposed to the motives and inspiration received from her father, and she looked at him with unamiable eyes.

While he saw this to some extent, he was unaccustomed to denial by others or by himself. She was alluringly beautiful, as she stood before him,--all the more valued because she valued herself so highly, all the more coveted because superior to the sordid motives upon which even he had counted as the chief allies in his suit. In the intense longing of a self-indulgent nature he broke out, seizing her hand as he spoke: "O Miss Marian, do not deny me. I know I could make you happy. I would give you everything. Your slightest wish should be law. I would be your slave."

"I do not wish a slave," she replied, freezingly, withdrawing her hand. "I am content, as I told you; but were I compelled to make a choice it should be in favor of a man to whom I could look up, and whom I could aid in manly work. I shall not make a choice until compelled to by my heart."

"If your heart is still your own, give me a chance to win it," resumed the suitor, seeking vainly to take her hand again. "I am in my prime, and can do more than most men. I will put my wealth at your disposal, engage in noble charities, patriotic--"

This interview had been so absorbing as to make them oblivious of the fact that another visitor had been admitted to the hall. Hearing voices in the drawing-room, Mr. Strahan entered, and now stood just behind Mr. Lanniere, with an expression in which dismay, amusement, and embarrassment were so comically blended that Marian, who first saw him, had to cover her face with her handkerchief to hide her sense of the ludicrous.

"Pardon me," said the inopportune new-comer, "I--I--"

"Maledictions on you!" exclaimed the goaded millionaire, now enraged beyond self-control, and confronting the young fellow with glaring, bloodshot eyes.

This greeting put Strahan entirely at his ease, and a glimpse of Marian's mirth had its influence also. She had turned instantly away, and gone to the farther side of the apartment.

"Come now, Mr. Lanniere," he said, with an assumption of much dignity; "there is scant courtesy in your greeting, and without reason. I have the honor of Miss Vosburgh's acquaintance as truly as yourself. This is her parlor, and she alone has the right to indicate that I am unwelcome. I shall demand no apologies here and now, but I shall demand them. I may appear very young--"

"Yes, you do; very young. I should think that ears like yours might have--" And then the older man paused, conscious that the violence of his anger was carrying him too far.

Strahan struck a nonchalant attitude, as he coolly remarked: "My venerable friend, your passion is unbecoming to your years. Miss Vosburgh, I humbly ask your pardon that my ears were not long enough to catch the purport of this interview. I am not in the habit of listening at a lady's door before I enter. My arrival at a moment so awkward for me was my misfortune. I discovered nothing to your discredit, Mr. Lanniere. Indeed, your appreciation of Miss Vosburgh is the most creditable thing I know about you,--far more so than your insults because I merely entered the door to which I was shown by the maid who admitted me. Miss Vosburgh, with your permission I will now depart, in the hope that you will forgive the annoyance--"

"I cannot give you my permission under the circumstances, Mr. Strahan. You have committed no offence against me, or Mr. Lanniere, either, as he will admit after a little thought. Let us regard the whole matter as one of those awkward little affairs over which good breeding can speedily triumph. Sit down, and I will call mamma."

"Pardon me, Miss Vosburgh," said Mr. Lanniere, in a choking voice, for he could not fail to note the merriment which the mercurial Strahan strove in vain to suppress; "I will leave you to more congenial society. I have paid you the highest compliment in my power, and have been ill-requited."

As if stung, the young girl took a step towards him, and said, indignantly: "What was the nature of your compliment? What have you asked but that I should sell myself for money? I may have appeared to you a mere society girl, but I was never capable of that. Good-evening, sir."

Mr. Lanniere departed with tingling ears, and a dawning consciousness that he had over-rated his million, and that he had made a fool of himself generally.

All trace of mirth passed from Strahan's expression, as he looked at the young girl's stern, flushed face and the angry sheen of her eyes.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "that's magnificent. I've seen a girl now to whom I can take off my hat, not as a mere form. Half the girls in our set would have given their eyes for the chance of capturing such a man. Think what a vista of new bonnets he suggests!"

"You are probably mistaken. One girl has proved how she regarded the vista, and I don't believe you had any better opinion of me than of the others. Come now, own up. Be honest. Didn't you regard me as one of the girls 'in our set' as you phrase it, that would jump at the chance?"

"Oh, nonsense, Miss Marian. The idea--"

She checked him by a gesture. "I wish downright sincerity, and I shall detect the least false note in your words."

Strahan looked into her resolute, earnest eyes a moment, and then revealed a new trait. He discarded the slight affectation that characterized his manner, stood erect, and returned her gaze steadily. "You ask for downright sincerity?" he said.

"Yes; I will take nothing less."

"You have no right to ask it unless you will be equally sincere with me."

"Oh, indeed; you are in a mood for bargains, as well as Mr. Lanniere."

"Not at all. You have stepped out of the role of the mere society girl. In that guise I shall be all deference and compliments. On the basis of downright sincerity I have my rights, and you have no right to compel me to give an honest opinion so personal in its nature without giving one in return."

"I agree," she said, after a moment's thought.

"Well, then, while I was by no means sure, I thought it was possible, even probable, that you would accept a man like Lanniere. I have

known society girls to do such things, haven't you?"

"And I tell you, Mr. Strahan, that you misjudge a great many society girls."

"Oh, you must tell me a great deal more than that. Have I not just discovered that I misjudged one? Now pitch into Arthur Strahan."

"I am inclined to think that I have misjudged you, also; but I will keep my compact, and give you the impression you made, and you won't like it."

"I don't expect to; but I shall expect downright sincerity."

"Very well. I'll test you. You are not simple and manly, even in your dress and manner; you are an anomaly in the country; you are inclined to gossip; and it's my belief that a young man should do more in life than amuse himself."

Strahan flushed, but burst out laughing as he exclaimed, "My photograph, by Jupiter!"

"Photographs give mere surface. Come, what's beneath it?"

"In one respect, at least, I think I am on a par with yourself. I have enough honest good-nature to listen to the truth with thanks."

"Is that all?"

"Come, Miss Marian, what is the use of words when I have had such an example of deeds? I have caught you, red-handed, in the act of giving a millionaire his conge. In the face of this stern fact do you suppose I am going to try to fish up some germs of manhood for your inspection? As you have suggested, I must do something, or I'm out of the race with you. I honestly believe, though, I am not such a fool as I have seemed. I shall always be something of a rattle-brain, I suppose, and if I were dying I could not help seeing the comical side of things." He hesitated a moment, and then asked, abruptly, "Miss Marian, have you read to-day's paper?"

"Yes, I have," with a tinge of sadness in her tone.

"Well, so have I. Think of thousands of fine young fellows lying stiff and stark in those accursed swamps!"

"Yes," she cried, with a rush of tears, "I WILL think of them. I will try to see them, horrible as the sight is, even in fancy. When they died so heroically, shame on me if I turn away in weak, dainty disgust! Oh, the burning shame that Northern girls don't think more of such men and their self-sacrifice!"

"You're a trump, Miss Marian; that's evident. Well, one little bit of gossip about myself, and then I must go. I have another engagement this evening. Old Lanniere was right. I'm young, and I've been very young. Of late I've made deliberate effort to remain a fool; but a man has got to be a fool or a coward down to the very hard-pan of his soul if the logic of recent events has no effect on him. I don't think I am exactly a coward, but the restraint of army-life, and especially roughing it, is very distasteful. I kept thinking

it would all soon be over, that more men were in now than were needed, and that it was a confounded disagreeable business, and all that. But my mind wasn't at rest; I wasn't satisfied with the ambitions of my callow youth; and, as usual when one is in trouble and in doubt about a step, I exaggerated my old folly to disguise my feelings. But this Richmond campaign, and the way Stonewall Jackson has been whacking our fellows in the Shenandoah, made me feel that I was standing back too long, and the battle described in to-day's paper brought me to a decision. I'm in for it, Miss Marian. You may think I'm not worth the powder required to blow me up, but I'm going to Virginia as soon as I can learn enough not to be more dangerous to those around me than to the enemy."

She darted to his side, and took his hand, exclaiming, "Mr. Strahan! forgive me; I've done you a hundred-fold more injustice than you have me!"

He was visibly embarrassed, a thing unusual with him, and he said, brusquely: "Oh, come now, don't let us have any pro patria exaltation. I don't resemble a hero any more than I do a doctor of divinity. I'm just like lots of other young fellows who have gone, only I have been slower in going, and my ardor won't set the river on fire. But the times are waking up all who have any wake-up in them, and the exhibition of the latest English cut in coats and trousers is taking on a rather inglorious aspect. How ridiculous it all seems in the light of the last battle! Jove! but I HAVE been young!"

He did look young indeed, with his blond mustache and flushed face, that was almost as fair as a girl's. She regarded him wonderingly, thinking how strangely events were applying the touchstone to one and another. But the purpose of this boyish-appearing exquisite was the most unexpected thing in the era of change that had begun. She could scarcely believe it, and exclaimed, "You face a cannon?"

"I don't look like it, do I? I fancy I would. I should be too big a coward to run away, for then I should have to come back to face you, which would be worse, you know. I'm not going to do any bragging, however. Deeds, deeds. Not till I have laid out a Johnny, or he has laid me out, can I take rank with you after your rout of the man of millions. I don't ask you to believe in me yet."

"Well, I do believe in you. You are making an odd yet vivid impression on me. I believe you will face danger just as you did Mr. Lanniere, in a half-nonchalant and a half-satirical mood, while all the time there will be an undercurrent of downright earnestness and heroism in you, which you will hide as if you were ashamed of it."

He flushed with pleasure, but only laughed, "We'll see." Then after a moment he added, "Since we are down to the bed-rock in our talk I'll say out the rest of my say, then follow Lanniere, and give him something more to digest before he sleeps."

"Halt, sir--military jargon already--how can you continue your quarrel with Mr. Lanniere without involving my name?"

Strahan looked blank for a second, then exclaimed: "Another evidence, of extreme youth! Lanniere may go to thunder before I risk annoying

you."

"Yes, thank you; please let him go to thunder. He won't talk of the affair, and so can do you no harm."

"Supposing he could, that would be no excuse for annoying you."

"I think you punished him sufficiently before he went, and without ceasing to be a gentleman, too. If you carry out your brave purpose you need not fear for your reputation."

"Well, Miss Marian, I shall carry it out. Society girl as I believed you to be, I like you better than the others. Don't imagine I'm going to be sentimental. I should stand as good a chance of winning a major-general's stars as you. I've seen better fellows raising the siege and disappearing, you know. Well, the story I thought would be short is becoming long. I wanted to tell you first what I proposed; for, hang it all! I've read it in your eyes that you thought I was little better than a popinjay, and I wished to prove to you that I could be a man after my fashion."

"I like your fashion, and am grateful for your confidence. What's more, you won't be able to deceive me a bit hereafter. I shall persist in admiring you as a brave man, and shall stand up for you through thick and thin."

"You always had a kind of loyalty to us fellows that we recognized and appreciated."

"I feel now as if I had not been very loyal to any one, not even myself. As with you, however, I must let the future tell a different story."

"If I make good my words, will you be my friend?"

"Yes, yes indeed, and a proud one. But oh!"--she clasped her hand over her eyes,--"what is all this tending to? When I think of the danger and suffering to which you may--"

"Oh, come now," he interrupted, laughing, but with a little suspicious moisture in eyes as blue as her own; "it will be harder for you to stay and think of absent friends than for them to go. I foresee how it will turn out. You will be imagining high tragedy on stormy nights when we shall be having a jolly game of poker. Good-night. I shall be absent for a time,--going to West Point to be coached a little by my friend Captain Varrum."

He drew himself up, saluted her a la militaire, right-about-faced with the stiffness of a ramrod, and was departing, when a light hand touched his arm, and Marian said, with a look so kind and sympathetic that his eyes fell before it: "Report to me occasionally, Captain Strahan. There are my colors;" and she gave him a white rose from her belt.

His mouth quivered slightly, but with a rather faltering laugh he replied, as he put the rose to his lips, "Never let the color suggest that I will show the white feather;" and then he began his military career with a precipitate retreat.

CHAPTER VIII.

CHARMED BY A CRITIC.

"WHAT next?" was Marian's wondering query after Mr. Strahan's departure. The change of motive which already had had no slight influence on her own action and feeling had apparently ushered in a new era in her experience; but the sense of novelty in personal affairs was quite lost as she contemplated the transformation in the mercurial Strahan, who had apparently been an irredeemable fop. That the fastidious exquisite should tramp through Virginia mud, and face a battery of hostile cannon, appeared to her the most marvellous of human paradoxes. An hour before she would have declared the idea preposterous. Now she was certain he would do all that he had said, and would do it in the manner satirical and deprecatory towards himself which she had suggested.

Radical as the change seemed, she saw that it was a natural one as he had explained it. If there was any manhood in him the times would evoke it. After all, his chief faults had been youth and a nature keenly sensitive to certain social influences. Belonging to a wealthy and fashionable clique in the city, he had early been impressed by the estimated importance of dress and gossip. To excel in these, therefore, was to become pre-eminent. As time passed, however, the truth, never learned by some, that his clique was not the world, began to dawn on him. He was foolish, but not a fool; and when he saw young fellows no older than himself going to the front, when he read of their achievements and sufferings, he drew comparisons. The result was that he became more and more dissatisfied. He felt that he was anomalous, in respect not only to the rural scenery of his summer home, but to the times, and the conviction was growing that the only way to right himself was to follow the host of American youth who had gone southward. It was a conviction to which he could not readily yield, and which he sought to disguise by exaggerating his well-known characteristics. People of his temperament often shrink from revealing their deeper feelings, believing that these would seem to others so incongruous as to call forth incredulous smiles. Strahan was not a coward, except in the presence of ridicule. This had more terrors for him than all the guns of the Confederacy; and he knew that every one, from his own family down, would laugh at the thought of his going to the war. In a way that puzzled him a little he felt that he would not care so much if Marian Vosburgh did not laugh. The battle of which he had read to-day had at last decided him; he must go; but if Marian would give him credit for a brave, manly impulse, and not think of him as a ludicrous spectacle when he donned the uniform, he would march away with a light heart. He did not analyze her influence over him, but only knew that she had a peculiar fascination which it was not in his impressionable nature to resist.

Thus it may be seen that he only gave an example of the truth that great apparent changes are the result of causes that have long been secretly active.

Marian, like many others, did not sufficiently take this fact into account, and was on the qui vive for other remarkable manifestations. They did not occur. As her father had predicted, life, in its outward conditions, resumed its normal aspects. Her mother laughed a little, sighed a little, when she heard the story of Mr. Lanniere's final exit; the coquettish kitchen-maid continued her career with undisturbed complacency; and Marian to her own surprise found that, after the first days of her enthusiasm had passed, it required the exertion of no little will-power to refrain from her old motives and tactics. But she was loyal to herself and to her implied promise to her father. She knew that he was watching her,—that he had set his heart on the development, in a natural way, of her best traits. She also knew that if she faltered she must face his disappointment and her own contempt.

She had a horror, however, of putting on what she called "goody-goody airs," and under the influence of this feeling acted much like her old self. Not one of her callers could have charged her with manifesting a certain kind of misleading favor, but her little salon appeared as free from restraint as ever, and her manner as genial and lively. It began to be observed by some, however, that while she participated unhesitatingly in the light talk of others, she herself would occasionally broach topics of more weight, especially such as related to the progress of the war; and more than once she gave such direction to her conversation with the artist as made his eyes kindle.

Her father was satisfied. He usually came home late on Saturday, and some of her gentleman friends who were in the habit of dropping in on a Sunday evening, were soon taught that these hours were engaged.

"You need not excuse yourself on my account," her father had said to her.

"But I shall," was her prompt response. "After all you have done and are doing for me, it's a pity if I can't give you one evening in the week. You are looking after other people in New York; I'm going to look after you; and you shall find that I am a sharp inquisitor. You must reveal enough of the secrets of that mysterious office of yours to satisfy me that you are not in danger."

He soon began to look forward with glad anticipation to his ramble by her side in the summer twilight. He saw that what he had done and what he had thought during the week interested her deeply, and to a girl of her intelligence he had plenty to tell that was far from commonplace. She saw the great drama of her country's history unfolding, and not only witnessed the events that were presented to the world, but was taken behind the scenes and shown many of the strange and secret causes that were producing them. Moreover expectation of something larger and greater was constantly raised. After their walk they would return to the house, and she would sing or read to him until she saw his eyes heavy with the sleep that steals gradually and refreshingly into a weary man's brain.

Mrs. Vosburgh observed this new companionship with but little surprise and no jealousy. "It was time," she said, "that Marian should begin to do something for her father, and not leave everything to me."

One thing puzzled Marian: weeks were passing and she neither saw nor heard anything of Lane or Strahan. This fact, in view of what had been said at parting, troubled her. She was not on calling terms with the latter's family, and therefore was unable to learn anything from them. Even his male friends in the neighborhood did not know where he was or what he was doing. Her father had taken the pains to inform himself that Lane was apparently at work in his law-office as usual. These two incipient subjects of the power she hoped to wield seemed to have dropped her utterly, and she was discouraged.

On the last day of June she was taking a ramble in a somewhat wild and secluded place not far from her home, and thinking rather disconsolately that her father had overrated her influence,—that after all she was but a pretty and ordinary girl, like millions of others,—a fact that Lane and Strahan had at last discovered. Suddenly she came upon the artist, sketching at a short distance from her. As she turned to retreat a twig snapped under her foot, revealing her presence. He immediately arose and exclaimed, "Miss Vosburgh, is it I that you fear, or a glimpse of my picture?"

"Neither, of course. I feared I might dispel an inspired mood. Why should I intrude, when you have nature before you and the muse looking over your shoulder?"

"Over my left shoulder, then, with a mocking smile. You are mistaken if you fancy you can harm any of my moods. Won't you stay and criticise my picture for me?"

"Why, Mr. Blauvelt, I'm not an art critic."

"Yes, you are,—one of the class I paint for. Our best critics are our patrons, cultivated people."

"I should never think of patronizing you."

"Perhaps you might entertain the thought of encouraging me a little, if you felt that I was worth it."

"Now, Mr. Blauvelt, notwithstanding the rural surroundings, you must remember that I was bred in the city. I know the sovereign contempt that you artists have for the opinions of the people. When it comes to art, I'm only people."

"No such generalization will answer in your case. You have as distinct an individuality as any flower blooming on this hillside."

"There are flowers and flowers. Some are quite common."

"None are commonplace to me, for there is a genuine bit of nature in every one. Still you are right: I was conscious of the fragrance from this eglantine-bush here, until you came."

"Oh, then let me go at once."

"I beg that you will not. You are the eglantine in human form, and often quite as briery."

"Then you should prefer the bush there, which gives you its beauty and fragrance without a scratch. But truly your comparison is too far-fetched, even for an artist or a poet, for I suppose they are near of kin. To sensible, matter-of-fact girls, nothing is more absurd than your idealization of us. See how quickly and honestly I can disenchant you. In the presence of both nature and art I am conscious that it is nearly lunch-time. You are far from your boarding-place, so come and take your luck with us. Mamma will be glad to see you, and after lunch I may be a more amiable critic."

"As a critic, I do not wish you to be amiable, but honest severity itself. That you stumbled upon me accidentally in your present mood is my good fortune. Tell me the faults in my picture in the plainest English, and I will gratefully accept your invitation; for the hospitality at your cottage is so genial that bread and cheese would be a banquet. I have a strong fancy for seeing my work through your eyes, and so much faith in you that I know you will tell me what you think, since I ask you to do so."

"Why have you faith in me?" she asked, with a quick, searching glance.

"I belong somewhat to the impressionist school, and my impression of you leads to my words."

"If you compel me to be honest, I must say I'm not capable of criticising your picture. I know little of art, and nothing of its TECHNIQUE."

"Eyes like yours should be able to see a great deal, and, as I said, I am possessed by the wish to know just what they do see. There is the scene I was sketching, and here the canvas. Please, Miss Marian."

"It will be your own fault, now, if you don't like what I say," laughed the young girl, with ready tact, for a quick glance or two had already satisfied her that the picture was not to her taste. "My only remark is this, Mr. Blauvelt,--Nature does not make the same impression on me that it does on you. There is the scene, as you say. How can I make you understand what I feel? Nature always looks so natural to me! It awakens within me various emotions, but never surprise,--I mean that kind of surprise one has when seeing a lady dressed in colors that do not harmonize. To my eye, even in gaudy October, Nature appears to blend her effects so that there is nothing startling or incongruous."

"Is there anything startling and incongruous in my picture?"

"I have not said that. You see you have brought me into perplexity, you have taken me beyond my depth, by insisting on having my opinion. I have read a good many art criticisms first and last. Art is gabbled about a good deal in society, you know, and we have to keep a set of phrases on hand, whether we understand them or not. But since you believe in impressions, and will have mine, it is this as nearly as I can express it. You are under the influence of a school or a fashion in art, and perhaps unconsciously you are controlled by this when looking at the scene there. It seems to me that if I were

an artist I should try to get on my canvas the same effects that nature produces, and I would do it after my own fashion and not after some received method just then prevailing. Let me illustrate what I mean by a phase of life that I know more about. There are some girls in society whose ambition it is to dress in the latest style. They are so devoted to fashion that they appear to forget themselves, and are happy if their costume reflects the mode of the hour, even though it makes them look hideous. My aim would be to suggest the style rather unobtrusively, and clothe myself becomingly. I'm too egotistical to be ultra-fashionable. Since I, who am in love chiefly with myself, can so modify style, much more should you, who are devoted to nature, make fashion in art subservient to nature."

"You are right. I have worked too much in studios and not enough out of doors. Ever since I have been sketching this summer, I have had a growing dissatisfaction, and a sense of being trammelled. I do believe, as you say, that a certain received method or fashion of treatment has been uppermost in my mind, and I have been trying to torture--nature into conformity. I'll paint this thing all out and begin again."

"No, don't do that. Are not pictures like people a little? If I wanted to improve in some things, it wouldn't do for me to be painted all out. Cannot changes for the better come by softening features here and bringing out others there, by colorings a little more like those before us, and--pardon me--by not leaving so much to the imagination? You artists can see more between the lines than we people can."

"Let me try;" and with eager eyes he sat down before his easel again. "Now see if I succeed a little," he added, after a moment.

His whole nature appeared kindled and animated by hope. He worked rapidly and boldly. His drawing had been good before, and, as time passed, nature's sweet, true face began to smile upon him from his canvas. Marian grew almost as absorbed as himself, learning by actual vision how quick, light strokes can reproduce and preserve on a few square inches the transitory beauty of the hour and the season.

At times she would stimulate his effort by half-spoken sentences of satisfaction, and at last he turned and looked up suddenly at her flushed, interested face.

"You are the muse," he exclaimed, impetuously, "who, by looking over my shoulder, can make an artist of me."

She instinctively stepped farther away, saying, decisively, "Be careful then to regard me as a muse."

She had replied to his ardent glance and tone, even more than to his words. There was not a trace of sentiment in her clear, direct gaze. The quiet dignity and reserve of her manner sobered him instantly. Her presence, her words, the unexpected success in the new departure which she had suggested, had excited him deeply; yet a moment's thought made it clear that there had been nothing on her part to warrant the hope of more than friendly interest. This interest might easily be lost by a few rash words, while there

was slight reason that he should ever hope for anything more. Then also came the consciousness of his straitened circumstances and the absurdity of incurring obligations which he might never be able to meet. He had assured himself a thousand times that art should be his mistress, yet here he was on the eve of acting like a fool by making love to one who never disguised her expensive tastes. He was not an artist of the olden school,--all romance and passion,--and the modishly dressed, reserved maiden before him did not, in the remotest degree, suggest a languishing heroine in days of yore, certain to love against sense and reason. The wild, sylvan shade, the June atmosphere, the fragrance of the eglantine, even the presence of art, in whose potent traditions mood is the highest law, could not dispel the nineteenth century or make this independent, clear-headed American girl forget for a moment what was sensible and right. She stood there alone under the shadow of the chestnuts, and by a glance defined her rights, her position towards her companion, and made him respect them. Nor was he headlong, passionate, absurd. He was a part of his age, and was familiar with New York society. The primal instincts of his nature had obtained ascendancy for a moment. Ardent words to the beautiful girl who looked over his shoulder and inspired his touch seemed as natural as breath. She had made herself for the moment a part of his enthusiasm. But what could be the sequel of ardent words, even if successful, but prosaic explanations and the facing of the inexorable problem of supporting two on an income that scarcely sufficed for the Bohemian life of one?

He had sufficient self-control, and was mentally agile enough to come down upon his feet. Rising, he said, quietly: "If you will be my muse, as far as many other claims upon your time and thoughts permit, I shall be very grateful. I have observed that you have a good eye for harmony in color, and, what is best of all, I have induced you to be very frank. See how much you have helped me. In brief--Bless me! how long have you been here?"

He pulled out his watch in comic dismay, and held it towards her. "No lunch for us to-day," he concluded, ruefully.

"Well," exclaimed Marian, laughing, "this is the first symptom I have ever had of being an artist. It was quite natural that you should forget the needs of sublunary mortals, but that I should do so must prove the existence of an undeveloped trait. I could become quite absorbed in art if I could look on and see its wonders like a child. You must come home with me and take your chance. If lunch is over, we'll forage."

He laughingly shouldered his apparatus, and walked by her side through the June sunshine and shade, she in the main keeping up the conversation. At last he said, rather abruptly: "Miss Vosburgh, you do not look on like a child,--rather, with more intelligence than very many society girls possess; and--will you forgive me?--you defend yourself like a genuine American woman. I have lived abroad, you know, and have learned how to value such women. I wish you to know how much I respect you, how truly I appreciate you, and how grateful and honored I shall feel if you will be simply a frank, kind friend. You made use of the expression 'How shall I make you understand?' So I now use it, and suggest what I mean by a question,--Is there not something in a man's nature which enables him to do better if some woman, in whom he believes, shows that

she cares?"

"I should be glad if this were true of some men," she said, gently, "because I do care. I'll be frank, too. Nothing would give me a more delicious sense of power than to feel that in ways I scarcely understood I was inciting my friends to make more of themselves than they would if they did not know me. If I cannot do a little of what you suggest, of what account am I to my friends?"

"Your friends can serve a useful purpose by amusing you."

"Then the reverse is true, and I am merely amusing to my friends. Is that the gist of your fine words, after all?" and her face flushed as she asked the question.

"No, it is not true, Miss Vosburgh. You have the power of entertaining your friends abundantly, but you could make me a better artist, and that with me would mean a better man, if you took a genuine interest in my efforts."

"I shall test the truth of your words," was her smiling response. "Meanwhile you can teach me to understand art better, so that I shall know what I am talking about." Then she changed the subject.

CHAPTER IX.

A GIRL'S LIGHT HAND.

ON the evening of the 3d of July Marian drove down in her phaeton to the station for her father, and was not a little surprised to see him advancing towards her with Mr. Lane. The young man shook hands with her cordially, yet quietly, and there was something in his expression that assured her of the groundlessness of all the fears she had entertained.

"I have asked Mr. Lane to dine with us," said her father. "He will walk over from the hotel in the course of half an hour."

While the gentlemen had greeted her smilingly, there had been an expression on their faces which suggested that their minds were not engrossed by anticipation of a holiday outing. Marian knew well what it meant. The papers had brought to every home in the land the tidings of the awful seven days' fighting before Richmond. So far from taking the city, McClellan had barely saved his army. Thousands of men were dead in the swamps of the Chickahominy; thousands were dying in the sultry heat of the South and on the malarial banks of the James.

Mr. Vosburgh's face was sad and stern in its expression, and when Marian asked, "Papa, is it so bad as the papers say?" he replied:

"God only knows how bad it is. For a large part of our army it is as bad as it can be. The most terrible feature of it all to me is that thick-headed, blundering men are holding in their irresolute hands the destinies of just such brave young fellows as Mr. Lane here. It is not so dreadful for a man to die if his death furthers a cause which he believes to be sacred, but to die from the sheer stupidity and weakness of his leaders is a bitter thing. Instead of brave action, there is fatal blundering all along the line. For a long time the President, sincere and true-hearted as he is, could not learn that he is not a military man, and he has permitted a large part of our armies to be scattered all over Virginia. They have accomplished next to nothing. McClellan long since proved that he would not advance without men enough to walk over everything. He is as heavy as one of his own siege guns. He may be sure, if he has all he wants, but is mortally slow, and hadn't brains enough to realize that the Chickahominy swamps thinned his army faster than brave fighting. He should have been given the idle, useless men under McDowell and others, and then ordered to take Richmond. If he wouldn't move, then they should have put a man in his place who would, and not one who would sit down and dig. At last he has received an impetus from Richmond, instead of Washington, and he has moved at a lively pace, but to the rear. His men were as brave as men could be; and if the courage shown on the retreat, or change of base, as some call it, had been manifested in an advance, weeks ago, Richmond would have been ours. The 'change of base' has carried us well away from the point attacked, brave men have suffered and died in vain, and the future is so clouded that only one thing is certain."

"What is that, papa?" was the anxious query.

"We must never give up. We must realize that we are confronting some of the best soldiers and generals the world has known. The North is only half awake to its danger and the magnitude of its task. We have sent out comparatively few of our men to do a disagreeable duty for us, while we take life comfortably and luxuriously as before. The truth will come home to us soon, that we are engaged in a life-and-death struggle."

"Papa, these events will bring no changes to you? In your work, I mean?"

"Not at present. I truly believe, Marian, that I can serve my country more effectively in the performance of the duties with which I am now charged. But who can tell what a day will bring forth? Lane is going to the front. He will tell you all about it. He is a manly fellow, and no doubt will explain why you have not heard from him."

"Real life has come in very truth," thought Marian, as she went to her room to prepare for dinner; "but on every side it also brings the thought of death."

Her face was pale, and clouded with apprehension, when she joined the gentlemen; but Lane was so genial and entertaining at dinner as to make it difficult for her to believe that he had resolved on a step so fraught with risk. When at last they were alone in the drawing-room she said, "Is it true that you intend to enter the army?"

"Yes, and it is time that it was true," was his smiling reply.

"I don't feel like laughing, Mr. Lane. Going to Virginia does not strike me as a pleasure excursion. I have thought a great deal since I saw you last. You certainly have kept your promise to be a distant and absent friend."

He looked at her eagerly, as he said, "You have thought a great deal--have you thought about me?"

"Certainly," she replied, with a slight flush; "I meant all that I said that evening."

That little emphasized word dispelled the hope that had for a moment asserted itself. Time and a better acquaintance with her own heart had not brought any change of feeling to her, and after a moment he said, quietly: "I think I can prove that I have been a sincere and loyal friend as well as an absent one. Having never felt--well, you cannot know--it takes a little time for a fellow to--pardon me; let all that go. I have tried to gain self-control, and I have obeyed your request, to do nothing rash, literally. I remained steadily at work in my office a certain number of hours every day. If the general hope that Richmond would be taken, and the war practically ended, had proved well founded, for the sake of others I should have resisted my inclination to take part in the struggle. I soon concluded, however, that it would be just as well to prepare for what has taken place, and so gave part of my afternoons and evenings to a little useful training. I am naturally very fond of a horse, and resolved that if I went at all it should be as a cavalry-man, so I have been giving not a little of my time to horseback exercise, sabre, pistol, and carbine practice, and shall not be quite so awkward as some of the other raw recruits. I construed McClellan's retreat into an order for me to advance, and have come to you as soon as I could to report progress."

"Why could you not have come before?--why could you not have told me?" she asked, a little reproachfully.

"Some day perhaps you will know," he replied, turning away for a moment.

"I feared that maturer thought had convinced you that I could not be much of a friend,--that I was only a gay young girl who wouldn't appreciate an earnest man's purposes."

"Miss Marian, you wrong me in thinking that I could so wrong you. Never for a moment have I entertained such a thought. I can't explain to you all my experience. I wished to be more sure of myself, to have something definite to tell you, that would prove me more worthy of your friendship."

"My faith in you has never faltered a moment, Mr. Lane. While your words make me proud indeed, they also make me very sad. I don't wonder that you feel as you do about going, and were I a man I should probably take the same course. But I am learning at last what this war means. I can't with a light heart see my friends go."

"Let it be with a brave heart, then. There are tears in your eyes, Miss Marian."

"Why should there not be? O Mr. Lane, I am not coldhearted and callous. I am not so silly and shallow as I seemed."

"I never thought you so--"

By a gesture she stopped him, as she continued: "I recognized the expression on papa's face and yours the moment I saw you, and I know what it means."

"Yes, Miss Marian; and I recognize the expression on your face. Were you a man you would have gone before this."

"I think it would be easier to go than to stay and think of all one's friends must face."

"Of course it would be for one like you. You must not look on the dark side, however. You will scarcely find a jollier set of men than our soldiers."

"I fear too many are reckless. This you have promised me not to be."

"I shall keep my promise; but a soldier must obey orders, you know. O Miss Marian, it makes such a difference with me to know that you care so much! Knowing you as I do now, it would seem like black treason to do or be anything unmanly."

Callers were now announced, and before an hour had passed there were half a dozen or more young men in the drawing-room. Some were staying at the hotel, but the majority were from the villas in the neighborhood, the holiday season permitting the return of those in business. However dark and crimson might be the tide of thought that flowed through the minds of those present, in memory of what had occurred during the last few days, the light of mirth played on the surface. The times afforded themes for jest, rather than doleful predictions. Indeed, in accordance with a principle in human nature, there was a tendency to disguise feelings and anxiety by words so light as to border on recklessness. Questions as to future action were coming home to all the young men, but not for the world would they permit one another, or especially a spirited young girl, to suspect that they were awed, or made more serious even, by the thought that the battle was drawing nearer to them. Lane was a leader in the gayety. His presence was regarded by some with both surprise and surmise. It had been thought that he had disappeared finally below Miss Vosburgh's horizon, but his animated face and manner gave no indication of a rejected and despondent suitor.

The mirth was at its height when Strahan entered, dressed plainly in the uniform of a second lieutenant. He was greeted with a shout of laughter by the young men, who knew him well, and by a cordial pressure from Marian's hand. This made the gauntlet which he knew he must run of little consequence to him. All except Lane drew up and gave him a military salute.

"Pretty fair for the awkward squad," he remarked, coolly.

"Come, report, report," cried several voices; "where have you been?"

"In Virginia."

"Why, of course, fellows, he's been arranging the change of base with McClellan, only the army went south and he came north."

"I've been farther south than any of you."

"See here, Strahan, this uniform is rather new for a veteran's."

"Yes; never dealt in old clothes."

"Where's your command?"

"Here, if you'll all enlist. I think I could make soldiers of some of you."

"Why, fellows, what a chance for us! If Strahan can't teach us the etiquette of war, who can?"

"Yes, gentlemen; and I will give you the first rule in advance. Always face the music."

"Dance music, you mean. Strahan has been at West Point and knows that a fellow in civilian togs stands no chance. How he eclipses us all to-night with the insignia of rank on his shoulders! Where will you make headquarters?"

"At home, for the present."

"That's right. We knew you would hit upon the true theory of campaigning. Never was there a better strategic point for your operations, Strahan, than the banks of the Hudson."

"I shall try to prove you right. A recruiting sergeant will join me in a day or two, and then I can accommodate you all with muskets."

"All? Not Miss Marian?"

"Those possessing her rank and influence do not carry muskets."

"Come, fellows, let us celebrate the 4th by enlisting under Strahan," cried the chief spokesman, who was not a very friendly neighbor of the young officer. "It won't be long before we shall know all the gossip of the Confederacy."

"You will certainly have to approach near enough to receive some very direct news."

"Gentlemen," cried Marian, "a truce! Mr. Strahan has proved that he can face a hot fire, and send back good shots, even when greatly outnumbered. I have such faith in him that I have already given him my colors. You may take my word for it that he will render a good account of himself. I am now eager to hear of his adventures."

"I haven't had any, Miss Marian. What I said about Virginia was mere bluff,--merely made an excursion or two on the Virginia side of the Potomac, out of curiosity."

"But what does this uniform mean?"

"Merely what it suggests. I went to Washington, which is a great camp, you know. Through relatives I had some influence there, and at last obtained a commission at the bottom of the ladder in a new regiment that is to be recruited. Meanwhile I was put through the manual of arms, with a lot of other awkward fellows, by a drill officer. I kept shady and told my people to be mum until something came out of it all. Come, fellows, thirteen dollars a month, hard tack, and glory! Don't all speak at once!"

"I'm with you as far as going is concerned," said Lane, shaking Strahan's hand warmly, "only I've decided on the cavalry."

"Were I a man, you should have one recruit for your regiment to-night," said Marian. "You have gone to work in a way that inspires confidence."

"I foresee, fellows, that we shall all have to go, or else Miss Marian will cross us out of her books," remarked one of the young men.

"No, indeed," she replied. "I would not dare urge any one to go. But those who, like Mr. Lane and Mr. Strahan, decide the question for themselves, cannot fail to carry my admiration with them."

"That's the loudest bugle call I expect to hear," remarked Mr. Blauvelt, who entered at that moment.

"Here's the place to open your recruiting-office," added another, laughing. "If Miss Marian would be free with her colors, she could raise a brigade."

"I can assure you beforehand that I shall not be free with them; much less will I hold them out as an inducement. Slight as may be their value, they must be earned."

"What chivalrous deed has Strahan performed?" was asked, in chorus.

"One that I appreciate, and I don't give my faith lightly,"

"Mr. Strahan, I congratulate you," said Lane, with a swift and somewhat reproachful glance at Marian; "you have already achieved your best laurels."

"I've received them, but not earned them yet. Miss Marian gives a fellow a good send-off, however, and time will tell the story with us all. I must now bid you good-evening," he said to the young girl. "I merely stopped for a few moments on my way from the train."

She followed him to the door, and said, sotto voce: "You held your own splendidly. Your first report is more than satisfactory;" and he departed happier than any major-general in the service.

When the rest had gone, Lane, who had persistently lingered, began: "No doubt it will appear absurd to you that a friend should be jealous. But Strahan seems to have won the chief honors."

"Perhaps he has deserved them, Mr. Lane. I know what your opinion of him was, and I think you guessed mine. He has won the chief battle

of life,--victory over himself. Ever since I have known you, you have inspired my respect as a strong, resolute man. In resolving upon what you would do instinctively Mr. Strahan has had such a struggle that he has touched my sympathies. One cannot help feeling differently toward different friends, you know. Were I in trouble, I should feel that I could lean upon you. To encourage and sustain would always be my first impulse with Mr. Strahan. Are you content?"

"I should try to be, had I your colors also."

"Oh, I only gave him a rose. Do you want one?"

"Certainly."

"Well, now you are even," she said, laughing, and handing him one of those she wore.

He looked at it thoughtfully for a moment, and then said, quietly: "Some would despise this kind of thing as the merest sentiment. With others it would influence the sternest action and the supreme moments of life."

CHAPTER X.

WILLARD MERWYN.

DURING her drives Marian had often passed the entrance to one of the finest old places in the vicinity, and, although aware that the family was absent in Europe, she had observed that the fact made no difference in the scrupulous care of that portion of the grounds which was visible. The vista from the road, however, was soon lost among the boles and branches of immense overshadowing oaks. Even to the passer-by an impression of seclusion and exclusion was given, and Marian at last noted that no reference was made to the family in the social exchanges of her little drawing-room. The dwelling to which the rather stiff and stately entrance led was not visible from the car-windows as she passed to and from the city, so abrupt was the intervening bluff, but upon one occasion from the deck of a steamboat she had caught glimpses through the trees of a large and substantial brick edifice.

Before Strahan had disappeared for a time, as we have related, her slight curiosity had so far asserted itself that she had asked for information concerning the people who left their beautiful home untenanted in June.

"I fancy I can tell you more about them than most people in this vicinity, but that is not so very much. The place adjoins ours, and as a boy I fished and hunted with Willard Merwyn a good deal. Mrs. Merwyn is a widow and a Southern-bred woman. A Northern man

of large wealth married her, and then she took her revenge on the rest of the North by having as little to do with it as possible. She was said to own a large property in the South,--plantation, negroes, and all that. The place on the Hudson belonged to the Merwyn side of the house, and the family have only spent a few summers here and have been exclusive and unpopular. My mother made their acquaintance abroad, and they knew it would be absurd to put on airs with us; so the ladies of the two families have exchanged more or less formal visits, but in the main they have little to do with the society of this region. As boys Willard and myself did not care a fig for these things, and became very good friends. I have not seen him for several years; they have all been abroad; and I hear that he has become an awful swell."

"Why then, if he ever returns, you and he will be good friends again," Marian had laughingly replied and had at once dismissed the exclusive Merwyns from her mind.

On the morning of the 4th of July Strahan had come over to have a quiet talk with Marian, and had found Mr. Lane there before him. By feminine tactics peculiarly her own, Marian had given them to understand that both were on much the same footing, and that their united presence did not form "a crowd;" and the young men, having a common ground of purpose and motive, were soon at ease together, and talked over personal and military matters with entire freedom, amusing the young girl with accounts of their awkwardness in drill and of the scenes they had witnessed. She was proud indeed of her two knights, as she mentally characterized them,--so different, yet both now inspiring a genuine liking and respect. She saw that her honest goodwill and admiration were evoking their best manhood and giving them as much happiness as she would ever have the power to bestow, and she felt that her scheme of life was not a false one. They understood her fully, and knew that the time had passed forever when she would amuse herself at their expense. She had become an inspiration of manly endeavor, and had ceased to be the object of a lover's pursuit. If half-recognized hopes lurked in their hearts, the fulfilment of these must be left to time.

"By the way," remarked Strahan, as he was taking his leave, "I hear that these long-absent Merwyns have deigned to return to their native land,--for their own rather than their country's good though, I fancy. I suppose Mrs. Merwyn feels that it is time she looked after her property and maintained at least the semblance of loyalty. I also hear that they have been hob-nobbing with the English aristocracy, who look upon us Yankees as a 'blasted lot of cads, you know.' Shall I bring young Merwyn over to see you after he arrives?"

"As you please," she replied, with an indifferent shrug.

Strahan had a half-formed scheme in his mind, but when he called upon young Merwyn he was at first inclined to hesitate. Great as was his confidence in Marian, he had some vaguely jealous fears, more for the young girl than for himself, in subjecting her to the influence of the man that his boyhood's friend had become.

Willard Merwyn was a "swell" in Strahan's vernacular, but even in the early part of their interview he gave the impression of being something more, or rather such a superior type of the "swell" genus, that Marian's friend was conscious of a fear that the young girl

might be dazzled and interested, perhaps to her sorrow.

Merwyn had developed into a broad-shouldered man, nearly six feet in height. His quiet, courteous elegance did not disguise from one who had known him so well in boyhood an imperious, self-pleasing nature, and a tenacity of purpose in carrying out his own desires. He accepted of his quondam friend's uniform without remark. That was Strahan's affair and not his, and by a polite reserve, he made the mercurial fellow feel that his affairs were his own. Strahan chafed under this polished reticence, this absence of all curiosity.

"Blast him!" thought the young officer, "he acts like a superior being, who has deigned to visit America to look after his rents, and intimates that the country has no further concern with him or he with it. Jove! I'd give all the pay I ever expect to get to see him a rejected suitor of my plucky little American girl;" and he regarded his host with an ill-disposed eye. At last he resolved to take the initiative boldly.

"How long do you expect to remain here, Merwyn?"

"I scarcely know. It depends somewhat on my mother's plans."

"Thunder! It's time you had plans of your own, especially when a man has your length of limb and breadth of chest."

"I have not denied the possession of plans," Merwyn quietly remarked, his dark eye following the curling, upward flight of smoke from his cigar.

"You certainly used to be decided enough sometimes, when I wanted you to pull an oar."

"And you so good-naturedly let me off," was the reply, with a slight laugh.

"I didn't let you off good-naturedly, nor do I intend to now. Good heavens, Merwyn! don't you read the papers? There's a chance now to take an oar to some purpose. You were brave enough as a boy."

Merwyn's eyes came down from the curling smoke to Strahan's face with a flash, and he rose and paced the room for a moment, then said, in his old quiet tones, "They say the child is father of the man."

"Oh well, Merwyn," was the slightly irritable rejoinder, "I have and ever had, you remember, a way of expressing my thoughts. If, while abroad, you have become intolerant of that trait, why, the sooner we understand each other the better. I don't profess to be anything more than an American, and I called to-day with no other motive than the obvious and natural one."

A shade of annoyance passed over Merwyn's face, but as Strahan ceased he came forward and held out his hand, saying: "I like you all the better for speaking your thoughts,--for doing just as you please. You must be equally fair and yield to me the privilege of keeping my thoughts, and doing as I please."

Strahan felt that there was nothing to do but to take the proffered

hand, so irresistible was the constraint of his host's courtesy, although felt to be without warmth or cordiality. Disguising his inward protest by a light laugh he said: "I could shake hands with almost any one on such a mutual understanding. Well, since we have begun on the basis of such absolute frankness on my part, my next thought is, What shall be our relations while you are here? I am a busier fellow than I was at one time, and my stay is also uncertain, and sure to be brief. I do not wish to be unneighborly in remembrance of old times, nor do I wish to be obtrusive. In the natural order of things, I should show you, a comparative stranger, some attention, inform you about the natives and transient residents, help you amuse yourself, and all that. But I have not the slightest desire to make unwelcome advances. I have plenty of such in prospect south of Mason and Dixon's line."

Merwyn laughed with some heartiness as he said: "You have attained one attribute of a soldier assuredly,--bluntness. Positively, Strahan, you have developed amazingly. Why, only the other day we were boys squabbling to determine who should have the first shot at an owl we saw in the mountains. The result was, the owl took flight. You never gave in an inch to me then, and I liked you all the better for it. Come now, be reasonable. I yield to you your full right to be yourself; yield as much to me and let us begin where we left off, with only the differences that years have made, and we shall get on as well as ever."

"Agreed," said Strahan, promptly. "Now what can I do for you? I have only certain hours at my disposal."

"Well," replied Merwyn, languidly, "come and see me when you can, and I'll walk over to your quarters--I suppose I should so call them--and have a smoke with you occasionally. I expect to be awfully dull here, but between the river and the mountains I shall have resources."

"You propose to ignore society then?"

"Why say 'ignore'? That implies a conscious act. Let us suppose that society is as indifferent to me as I to it."

"There's a little stutterer down at the hotel who claims to be an English lord."

"Bah, Strahan! I hope your sword is sharper than your satire. I've had enough of English lords for the present."

"Yes, Merwyn, you appear to have had enough of most things,--perhaps too much. If your countrymen are uninteresting, you may possibly wish to meet some of your countrywomen. I've been abroad enough to know that you have never found their superiors."

"Well, that depends upon who my countrywoman is. I should prefer to see her before I intrude--"

"Risk being bored, you mean."

"As you please. Fie, Strahan! you are not cultivating a soldier's penchant for women?"

"It hasn't needed any cultivating. I have my opinion of a man who does not admire a fine woman."

"So have I, only each and all must define the adjective for themselves."

"It has been defined for me. Well, my time is up. We'll be two friendly neutral powers, and, having marked out our positions, can maintain our frontiers with diplomatic ease. Good-morning."

Merwyn laughingly accompanied his guest to the door, but on the piazza, they met Mrs. Merwyn, who involuntarily frowned as she saw Strahan's uniform, then with quiet elegance she greeted the young man. But he had seen her expression, and was somewhat formal.

"We shall hope to see your mother and sisters before long," the lady remarked.

Strahan bowed, and walked with military erectness down the avenue, his host looking after him with cynical and slightly contemptuous good-nature; but Mrs. Merwyn followed the receding figure with an expression of great bitterness.

Her appearance was that of a remarkable woman. She was tall, and slight; every motion was marked by grace, but it was the grace of a person accustomed to command. One would never dream of woman's ministry when looking at her. Far more than would ever be true of Marian she suggested power, but she would govern through her will, her pride and prejudices. The impress of early influences had sunk deep into her character. The only child of a doting father, she had ruled him, and, of course, the helpless slaves who had watched her moods and trembled at her passion. There were scars on human backs to-day, which were the results of orders from her girlish lips. She was not greatly to blame. Born of a proud and imperious ancestry, she had needed the lessons of self-restraint and gentleness from infancy. Instead, she had been absolute, even in the nursery; and as her horizon had widened it had revealed greater numbers to whom her will was law. From childhood she had passed into maidenhood with a dower of wealth and beauty, learning early, like Marian, that many of her own race were willing to become her slaves.

In the South there is a chivalric deference to women far exceeding that usually paid to the sex at the North, and her appearance, temperament, and position evoked that element to the utmost. He knows little of human nature who cannot guess the result. Yet, by a common contradiction, the one among her many suitors who won such love as she could give was a Northern man as proud as herself. He stood alone in his manner of approach, made himself the object of her thoughts by piquing her pride, and met her varying moods by a quiet, unvarying dignity that compelled her respect. The result was that she yielded to the first man who would not yield undue deference to her.

Mr. Merwyn employed his power charily, however, or rather with principle. He quietly insisted on his rights; but as he granted hers without a word, and never irritated her by small, fussy exactions, good-breeding prevented any serious clashing of wills, and their married life had passed in comparative serenity. As time elapsed her will began, in many ways, to defer to his quieter and stronger

will, and then, as if life must teach her that there is no true control except self-control, Mr. Merwyn died, and left her mistress of almost everything except herself.

It must not be supposed, however, that her self-will was a passionate, moody absolutism. She had outgrown that, and was too well-bred ever to show much temper. The tendency of her mature purposes and prejudices was to crystallize into a few distinct forms. With the feminine logic of a narrow mind, she made her husband an exception to the people among whom he had been born and bred. Widowed, she gave her whole heart to the South. Its institutions, habits, and social code were sacred, and all opponents thereof sacrilegious enemies. To that degree that they were hostile, or even unbelieving, she hated them.

During the years immediately preceding the war she had been abroad superintending the education of Willard and two younger daughters, and when hostilities began she was led to believe that she could serve the cause better in England than on her remote plantation. In her fierce partisanship, or rather perverted patriotism,--for in justice it must be said that she knew no other country than the South,--she was willing to send her son to Richmond. He thwarted this purpose by quietly manifesting one of his father's traits.

"No," he said, "I will not fight against the section to which my father belonged. To my mind it's a wretched political squabble at best, and the politicians will settle it before long. I have my life before me, and don't propose to be knocked on the head for the sake of a lot of political John Smiths, North or South."

In vain she tried to fire his heart with dreams of Southern empire. He had made up that part of himself derived from Northern birth--his mind--and would not yield. Meantime his Southern, indolent, pleasure-loving side was appealed to powerfully by aristocratic life abroad, and he felt it would be the sheerest folly to abandon his favorite pursuits. He was little more than a graceful animal, shrewd enough to know that his property was chiefly at the North, and that it would be unwise to endanger it.

Mrs. Merwyn's self-interest and natural affection led her to yield to necessity with fairly good grace. The course resolved upon by Willard preserved her son and the property. When the South had accomplished its ambitious dreams she believed she would have skill enough to place him high among its magnates, while, if he were killed in one of the intervening battles,--well, she was loyal enough to incur the risk, but at heart she did not deeply regret that she had escaped the probable sacrifice.

Thus time passed on, and she used her social influence in behalf of her section, but guardedly, lest she should jeopardize the interests of her children. In May of the year in which our story opened, the twenty-first birthday of Willard occurred, and was celebrated with befitting circumstance. He took all this quietly, but on the morning of the day following he said to his mother:--

"You remember the provisions of my father's will. My share of the property was to be transferred to me when I should become of age. We ought to return to New York at once and have the necessary papers made out."

In vain she protested that the property was well managed, that the income was received regularly, that he could have this, and that it would be intensely disagreeable for her to visit New York. He, who had yielded indifferently to all her little exactions, was inexorable, and the proud, self-willed woman found that he had so much law and reason on his side that she was compelled to submit.

Indeed, she at last felt that she had been unduly governed by her prejudices, and that it might be wise to go and see for themselves that their affairs were managed to the best advantage. Deep in her heart was also the consciousness that it was her husband's indomitable will that she was carrying out, and that she could never escape from that will in any exigency where it could justly make itself felt. She therefore required of her son the promise that their visit should be as unobtrusive as possible, and that he would return with her as soon as he had arranged matters to his mind. To this he had readily agreed, and they were now in the land for which the mother had only hate and the son indifference.

CHAPTER XI.

AN OATH AND A GLANCE.

As Strahan disappeared in the winding of the avenue a sudden and terrible thought occurred to Mrs. Merwyn. She glanced at her son, who had walked to the farther end of the piazza, and stood for a moment with his back towards her. His manly proportions made her realize, as she had never done before, that he had attained his majority,—that he was his own master. He had said he would not fight against the North, but, as far as the South was concerned, he had never committed himself. And then his terrible will!

She went to her room and thought. He was in a land seething with excitement and patriotic fervor. She knew not what influences a day might bring to bear upon him. Above all else she feared taunts for lack of courage. She knew that her own passionate pride slept in his breast and on a few occasions she had seen its manifestations. As a rule he was too healthful, too well organized and indolent, to be easily irritated, while in serious matters he had not been crossed. She knew enough of life to be aware that his manhood had never been awakened or even deeply moved, and she was eager indeed to accomplish their mission in the States and return to conditions of life not so electrical.

In the mean time she felt that she must use every precaution. She summoned a maid and asked that her son should be sent to her.

The young man soon lounged in, and threw himself into an easy chair.

His mother looked at him fixedly for a moment, and then asked, "Why is young Strahan in THAT uniform?"

"I didn't ask him," was the careless reply. "Obviously, however, because he has entered the service in some capacity."

"Did he not suggest that it would be a very proper thing for you to do, also?"

"Oh, of course. He wouldn't be Strahan if he hadn't. He has a high appreciation of a 'little brief authority,' especially if vested in himself. Believing himself to be so heroic he is inclined to call others to account."

"I trust you have rated such vaporings at their worth."

"I have not rated them at all. What do I care for little Strahan or his opinions? Nil."

"Shall you see much of him while we are compelled to remain in this detestable land?"

"More of him than of any one else, probably. We were boys together, and he amuses me. What is more to the point, if I make a Union officer my associate I disarm hostile criticism and throw an additional safeguard around my property. There is no telling to what desperate straits the Northern authorities may be reduced, and I don't propose to give them any grounds for confiscation."

"You are remarkably prudent, Willard, for a young man of Southern descent."

"I am of Northern descent also," he replied, with a light laugh.

"Father was as strong a Northern man--so I imagine--as you are a Southern woman, and so, by a natural law, I am neutral, brought to a standstill by two equal and opposite forces."

The intense partisan looked at him with perplexity, and for a moment felt a strange and almost superstitious belief in his words. Was there a reciprocal relation of forces which would render her schemes futile? She shared in the secret hopes and ambitions of the Southern leaders. Had Northern and Southern blood so neutralized the heart of this youth that he was indifferent to both sections? and had she, by long residence abroad, and indulgence, made him so cosmopolitan that he merely looked upon the world as "his oyster"? She was not the first parent who, having failed to instil noble, natural principles in childhood, is surprised and troubled at the outcome of a mind developing under influences unknown or unheeded. That the South would be triumphant she never doubted a moment. It would not merely achieve independence, but also a power that would grow like the vegetation of its genial climate, and extend until the tapering Isthmus of Panama became the national boundary of the empire. But what part would be taken by this strange son who seemed equally endowed with graceful indolence and indomitable will? Were his tireless strength and energy to accomplish nothing better than the climbing of distant mountains? and would he maintain indifference towards a struggle for a dominion beyond Oriental dreams? Physically and mentally he seemed capable of doing what he chose; practically he chose to do what he pleased from hour to hour. Amusing himself

with a languid, good-natured disregard of what he looked upon as trivial affairs, he was like adamant the moment a supreme and just advantage was his. He was her husband over again, with strange differences. What could she do at the present moment but the thing she proposed to do?

"Willard," she said, slowly, and in a voice that pierced his indifference, "have you any regard for me?"

"Certainly. Have I shown any want of respect?"

"That is not the question at all. You are young, Willard, and you live in the future. I live much in the past. My early home was in the South, where my family, for generations, has been eminent. Is it strange, then, that I should love that sunny land?"

"No, mamma."

"Well, all I ask at present is that you will promise me never, under any motive, to take up arms against that land of my ancestors."

"I have not the slightest disposition to do so."

"Willard, what to-day is, is. Neither you nor I know what shall be on the morrow. I never expected to marry a Northern man, yet I did so; nor should I regret it if I consulted my heart only. He was different from all his race. I did not foresee what was coming, or I could have torn my heart out before involving myself in these Northern complications. I cannot change the past, but I must provide for the future. O Willard, to your eyes your Northern fortune seems large. But a few years will pass before you will be shown what a trifle it is compared with the prizes of power and wealth that will be bestowed upon loyal Southerners. You have an ancestry, an ability, that would naturally place you among the foremost. Terrible as would be the sacrifice on my part, I could still give you my blessing if you imitated young Strahan in one respect, and devoted yourself heart, soul, and sword to our cause."

"The probable result would be that you and my sisters would be penniless, I sleeping in mud, and living on junk and hoe-cake. Another result, probable, only a little more remote, is that the buzzards would pick my bones. Faugh! Oh, no. I've settled that question, and it's a bore to think a question over twice. There are thousands of Americans in Europe. Their wisdom suits me until this tea-pot tempest is over. If any one doubts my courage I'll prove it fast enough, but, if I had my way, the politicians, North and South, should do their own fighting and starving."

"But, Willard, our leaders are not mere politicians. They are men of grand, far-reaching schemes, and when their plans are accomplished, they will attain regal power and wealth."

"Visions, mamma, visions. I have enough of my father's blood in my veins to be able to look at both sides of a question. Strahan asked me severely if I did not read the papers;" and he laughed lightly. "Well, I do read them, at least enough of them to pick out a few grains of truth from all the chaff. The North and South have begun fighting like two bull-dogs, and it's just a question which has the longer wind and the more endurance. The chances are

all in favor of the North. I shall not throw myself and property away for the sake of a bare possibility. That's settled."

"Have you ice-water in your veins?" his mother asked, passionately.

"I have your blood, madam, and my father's, hence I am what I am."

"Well, then you must be a man of honor, of your word. Will you promise never to take arms against the South?"

"I have told you I have no disposition to do so."

"The promise, then, can cost you little, and it will be a relief to my mind."

"Oh, well, mamma, if it will make you feel any easier, I promise with one exception. Both South and North must keep their hands off the property my father gave me."

"If Southern leaders were dictating terms in New York City, as they will, ere long, they would never touch your property."

"They had better not."

"You know what I mean, Willard. I ask you never to assume this hated Northern uniform, or put your foot on Southern soil with a hostile purpose."

"Yes, I can promise that."

"Swear it to me then, by your mother's honor and your father's memory."

"Is not my word sufficient?"

"These things are sacred to me, and I wish them treated in a sacred manner. If you will do this my mind will be at rest and I may be able to do more for you in the future."

"To satisfy you, I swear never to put on the Northern uniform or to enter the South with a hostile purpose."

She stepped forward and touched his forehead with her lips, as she said: "The compact is sealed. Your oath is registered on earth and in heaven. Your simple word as a man of honor will satisfy me as to one other request. I wish you never to speak to any one of this solemn covenant between us."

"I'm not in the habit of gossiping over family affairs," he replied, haughtily.

"I know that, and also that your delicacy of feeling would keep you from speaking of a matter so sacred to me. But I am older and more experienced than you, and I shall feel safer if you promise. You would not gossip about it, of course. You might refer to it to some friend or to the woman who became your wife. I can foresee complications which might make it better that it should be utterly unknown. You little know how I dream and plan for you, and I only

ask you never to speak of this interview and its character to a living soul."

"Certainly, mother, I can promise this. I should feel it small business to babble about anything which you take so to heart. These visions of empire occupy your mind and do no harm. I only hope you will meet your disappointment philosophically. Good-by now till lunch."

"Poor mamma!" thought the young man, as he started out for a walk; "she rails against Northern fanatics, forgetting that it is just possible to be a little fanatical on the Southern side of the line."

As he strode along in the sunshine his oath weighed upon him no more than if he had promised not to go out in his sail-boat that day.

At last, after surmounting a rather steep hill, he threw himself on the grass under the shade of a tree. "It's going to be awfully slow and stupid here," he muttered, "and it will be a month or two before we can return. I hoped to be back in time to join the Montagues in climbing Mont Blanc, and here I am tied up between these mole-hill mountains and city law-offices. How shall I ever get through with the time?"

A pony-phaeton, containing two ladies, appeared at the foot of the hill and slowly approached. His eyes rested on it in languid indifference, but, as it drew nearer, the younger of the two ladies fixed his attention. Her charming summer costume at first satisfied his taste, and, as her features became distinct, he was surprised at their beauty, as he thought at first; but he soon felt that animation redeemed the face from mere prettiness. The young girl was talking earnestly, but a sudden movement of the horse caused her to glance toward the road-side, and she encountered the dark eyes of a stranger. Her words ceased instantly. A slight frown contracted her brow, and, touching her horse with her whip, she passed on rapidly.

"By Jove! Strahan is right. If I have many such countrywomen in the neighborhood, I ought to find amusement."

He rose and sauntered after the phaeton, and saw that it turned in at a pretty little cottage, embowered in vines and trees. Making a mental note of the locality, he bent his steps in another direction, laughing as he thought: "From that one glance I am sure that those blue eyes will kindle more than one fellow before they are quenched. I wonder if Strahan knows her. Well, here, perhaps, is a chance for a summer lark. If Strahan is enamored I'd like to cut him out, for by all the fiends of dulness I must find something to do."

Strahan had accepted an invitation to lunch at the Vosburghs' that day, and arrived, hot and flushed, from his second morning's drill.

"Well!" he exclaimed, "I've seen the great Mogul."

"I believe I have also," replied Marian. "Has he not short and slightly curly hair, dark eyes, and an impudent stare?"

"I don't recognize the 'stare' exactly. Merwyn is polite enough

in his way, and confound his way! But the rest of your description tallies. Where did you see him?"

She explained.

"That was he, accomplishing his usual day's work. O ye dogs of war! how I would like to have him in my squad one of these July days! Miss Marian, I'd wear your shoe-tie in my cap the rest of my life, if you would humble that fellow and make him feel that he never spoke to a titled lady abroad who had not her equal in some American girl. It just enrages me to see a New-York man, no better born than myself, putting on such superior and indifferent airs. If he'd come to me and say, 'Strahan, I'm a rebel, I'm going to fight and kill you if I can,' I'd shake hands with him as I did not to-day. I'd treat him like a jolly, square fellow, until we came face to face in a fair fight, and then--the fortune of war. As it was, I felt like taking him by the collar and shaking him out of his languid grace. He told me to mind my own business so politely that I couldn't take offence, although he gave scarcely any other reason than that he proposed to mind his. When I met his Southern mother on the piazza, she looked at me in my uniform at first as if I had been a toad. They are rebels at heart, and yet they stand aloof and sneer at the North, from which they derive protection and revenue. I made his eyes flash once though," chuckled the young fellow in conclusion.

Marian laughed heartily as she said: "Mr. Strahan, if you fight as well as you talk, I foresee Southern reverses. You have no idea how your indignation becomes you. 'As well-born,' did you say? Why, my good friend, you are worth a wilderness of such lackadaisical fellows. Ciphers don't count unless they stand after a significant figure; neither do such men, unless stronger men use them."

"Your arithmetic is at fault, Miss Marian. Ciphers do have the power of pushing a significant figure way back to the right of the decimal point, and, as a practical fact, these elegant human ciphers usually stand before good men and true in society. I don't believe it would be so with you, but few of us would stand a chance with most girls should this rich American, with his foreign airs and graces, enter the lists against us."

In her sincerity and earnestness, she took his hand and said: "I thank you for your tribute. You are right. Though this person had the wealth of the Indies, and every external grace, he could not be my friend unless he were a MAN. I've talked with papa a good deal, and believe there are men in the Southern army just as honest and patriotic as you are; but no cold-blooded, selfish betwixt-and-betweens shall ever take my hand."

"Make me a promise," cried Strahan, giving the hand he held a hearty and an approving shake.

"Well?"

"If opportunity offers, make this fellow bite the dust."

"We'll see about that. I may not think it worth the while, and I certainly shall not compromise myself in the slightest degree."

"But if I bring him here you will be polite to him?"

"Just about as polite as he was to you, I imagine."

"Miss Marian, I wouldn't have any harm come to you for the wide world. If--if anything should turn out amiss I'd shoot him, I certainly would."

The girl's only answer was a merry peal of laughter.

CHAPTER XII.

"A VOW."

BENT, as was Strahan, upon his scheme of disturbing Merwyn's pride and indifference, he resolved to permit several days to pass before repeating his call. He also, as well as Marian, was unwilling to compromise himself beyond a certain point, and it was his hope that he might receive a speedy visit. He was not disappointed, for on the ensuing day Merwyn sauntered up the Strahan avenue, and, learning that the young officer had gone to camp, followed him thither. The cold glance from the fair stranger in the phaeton dwelt in his memory, and he was pleased to find that it formed sufficient incentive to action.

Strahan saw him coming with a grim smile, but greeted him with off-hand cordiality. "Sorry, Merwyn," he said, "I can give you only a few moments before I go on duty."

"You are not on duty evenings?"

"Yes, every other evening."

"How about to-night?"

"At your service."

"Are you acquainted with the people who reside at a cottage--" and he described Marian's abode.

"Yes."

"Who are they?"

"Mr. Vosburgh has rented the place as a summer residence for his family. His wife and daughter are there usually, and he comes when he can.

"And the daughter's name?"

"Miss Marian Vosburgh."

"Will you introduce me to her?"

"Certainly."

"I sha'n't be poaching on your grounds, shall I?"

"Miss Vosburgh honors me with her friendship,--nothing more."

"Is it so great an honor?"

"I esteem it as such."

"Who are they, anyway?"

"Well, as a family I regard them as my equals, and Miss Marian as my superior."

"Oh come, Strahan, gossip about them a little."

The officer burst out laughing. "Well," he said, "for a man of your phenomenal reticence you are asking a good many questions."

Merwyn colored slightly and blundered: "You know my motive, Strahan; one does not care to make acquaintances that are not quite--" and then the expression of his host's eyes checked him.

"I assure you the Vosburghs are 'QUITE,'" Strahan said, coldly. "Did I not say they were my equals? You may esteem yourself fortunate if Miss Vosburgh ever permits you to feel yourself to be her equal."

"Why, how so?" a little irritably.

"Because if a man has brains and discernment the more he sees of her the more will he be inclined to doubt his equality."

Merwyn smiled in a rather superior way, and, with a light laugh, said: "I understand, Strahan. A man in your plight ought to feel in that way; at least, it is natural that he should. Now see here, old fellow, I'll keep aloof if you say so."

"Why should you? You have seen few society queens abroad who received so much and so varied homage as Miss Vosburgh. There are half a dozen fellows there, more or less, every evening, and you can take your chances among them."

"Oh, she's a bit of a coquette, then?"

"You must discover for yourself what she is," said the young man, buckling on his sword. "She has my entire respect."

"You quite pique my curiosity. I'll drive in for you this evening."

At the hour appointed, Strahan, in civilian's dress, stepped into Merwyn's carriage and was driven rapidly to the cottage. Throwing the reins to a footman, the young fellow followed the officer with a confidence not altogether well founded, as he soon learned. Many guests were present, and Lane was among them. When Merwyn was

presented Marian was observed to bow merely and not give her hand, as was her custom when a friend of hers introduced a friend. Some of the residents in the vicinity exchanged significant smiles when they saw that the fastidious and exclusive Willard Merwyn had joined their circle. Mrs. Vosburgh, who was helping to entertain the guests, recognized nothing in his presence beyond a new social triumph for her daughter, and was very gracious. To her offices, as hostess, he found himself chiefly relegated for a time.

This suited him exactly, since it gave him a chance for observation; and certainly the little drawing-room, with its refined freedom, was a revelation to him. Conversation, repartee, and jest were unrestrained. While Lane was as gay as any present, Merwyn was made to feel that he was no ordinary man, and it soon came out in the natural flow of talk that he, too, was in the service. Merwyn was introduced also to a captain of the regular army, and, whatever he might think of these people, he instinctively felt that they would no more permit themselves to be patronized than would the sons of noble houses abroad. Indeed, he was much too adroit to attempt anything of the kind, and, with well-bred ease, made himself at home among them in general conversation.

Meanwhile, he watched Marian with increasing curiosity. To him she was a new and very interesting type. He had seen no such vivacity and freedom abroad, and his experience led him to misunderstand her. "She is of the genus American girl, middle class," he thought, "who, by her beauty and the unconventionality of her drawing-room, has become a quasi-belle. None of these men would think of marrying her, unless it is little Strahan, and he wouldn't five years hence. Yet she is piquant and fascinating after her style, a word and a jest for each and all, and spoken with a sort of good-comradeship, rather than with an if-you-please-sir air. I must admit, however, that there is nothing loud in tone, word, or manner. She is as delicate and refined as her own beauty, and, although this rather florid mamma is present as chaperon, the scene and the actors are peculiarly American. Well, I owe Strahan a good turn. I can amuse myself with this girl without scruple."

At last he found an opportunity to say, "We have met once before, I believe, Miss Vosburgh."

"Met? Where?"

"Where I was inclined to go to sleep, and you gave me such a charming frown that I awakened immediately and took a long ramble."

"I saw a person stretched at lazy length under the trees yesterday. You know the horror ladies have of intoxicated men on the road-side."

"Was that the impression I made? Thanks."

"The impression made was that we had better pass as quickly as possible."

"You made a very different impression. Thanks to Strahan I am here this evening in consequence, and am delighted that I came."

"'Delighted' is a strong word, Mr. Merwyn. Now that we are speaking of impressions, mine is that years have elapsed since you were

greatly delighted at anything."

"What gives you such an impression?"

"Women can never account for their intuitions."

"Women? Do not use such an elderly word in regard to one appearing as if just entering girlhood."

"O Mr. Merwyn! have you not learned abroad that girls of my age are elderly indeed compared with men of yours?"

He bit his lip. "English girls are not so--"

"Fast?"

"I didn't say that. They certainly have not the vivacity and fascination that I am discovering in your drawing-room."

"Why, Mr. Merwyn! one would think you had come to America on a voyage of discovery, and were surprised at the first thing you saw."

"I think I could show you things abroad that would interest you."

"All Europe could not tempt me to go abroad at this time. In your estimation I am not even a woman,--only a girl, and yet I have enough girlhood to wish to take my little part in the events of the day."

He colored, but asked, quietly, "What part are you taking?"

"Such questions," she replied, with a merry, half-mocking flash of her eyes, "I answer by deeds. There are those who know;" and then, being addressed by Mr. Lane, she turned away, leaving him with confused, but more decided sensations than he had known for a long time.

His first impulse was to leave the house, but this course would only subject him to ridicule on the part of those who remained. After a moment or two of reflection he remembered that she had not invited him, and that she had said nothing essentially rude. He had merely chosen to occupy a position in regard to his country that differed radically from hers, and she had done little more than define her position.

"She is a Northern, as mamma is a Southern fanatic, with the difference that she is a young, effervescing creature, bubbling over with the excitement of the times," he thought. "That fellow in uniform, and the society of men like Strahan and Lane, have turned her head, and she has not seen enough of life to comprehend a man of the world. What do I care for her, or any here? Her briery talk should only amuse me. When she learns more about who I am and what I possess she will be inclined to imitate her discreet mamma and think of the main chance; meanwhile I escape a summer's dulness and ennui;" and so he philosophically continued his observations and chatted with Mrs. Vosburgh and others until, with Strahan, he took his departure, receiving from Marian a bow merely, while to Strahan she gave her hand cordially.

"You seem to be decidedly in Miss Vosburgh's good graces," said

Merwyn, as they drove away.

"I told you she was my friend."

"Is it very difficult to become her friend?"

"Well, that depends. You should not find it difficult, since you are so greatly my superior."

"Oh, come, Strahan."

"Pardon me, I forgot I was to express only my own thoughts, not yours."

"You don't know my thoughts or circumstances. Come now, let us be good comrades. I will begin by thanking you cordially for introducing me to a charming young girl. I am sure I put on no airs this evening."

"They would not have been politic, Merwyn, and, for the life of me, I can see no reason for them."

"Very well. Therefore you didn't see any. How like old times we are! We were always together, yet always sparring a little."

"You must take us as we are in these times," said Strahan, with a light laugh, for he felt it would jeopardize his scheme, or hope rather, if he were too brusque with his companion. "You see it is hard for us to understand your cosmopolitan indifference. American feeling just now is rather tense on both sides of the line, and if you will recognize the fact you will understand us better."

"I think I am already aware of the fact. If Miss Vosburgh were of our sex you would soon have another recruit."

"I'd soon have a superior officer, you mean."

"I fancy you are rather under her thumb already."

"It's a difficult position to attain, I assure you."

"How so?"

"I have observed that, towards a good many, Miss Vosburgh is quite your equal in indifference."

"I like her all the better for that fact."

"So do I."

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