The Project Gutenberg eBook of The Storm Centre: A Novel, by Charles Egbert Craddock

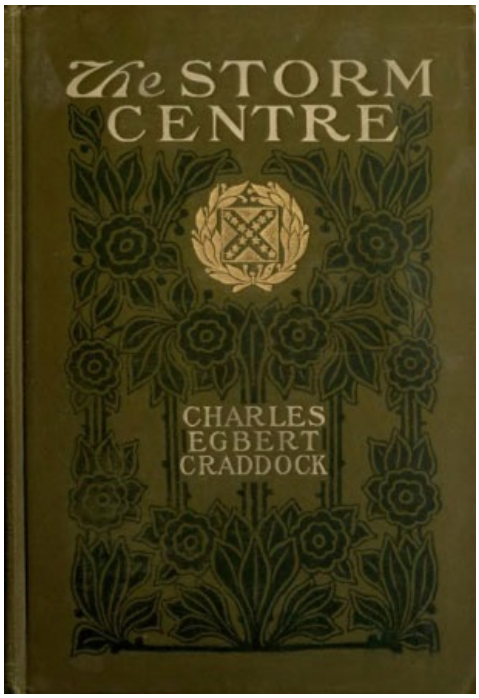
Title: The Storm Centre: A Novel

Author: Charles Egbert Craddock

Release Date: February 27, 2011 [EBook #35423]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by David Edwards, Val Wooff and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at https://www.pgdp.net (This file was produced from images generously made available by The Internet Archive.)



THE STORM CENTRE

THE STORM CENTRE

A NOVEL

BY
CHARLES EGBERT CRADDOCK
AUTHOR OF "THE STORY OF OLD FORT LOUDON," "A SPECTRE OF POWER," "IN THE STRANGER-PEOPLE'S COUNTRY," "THE PROPHET OF THE GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS," "WHERE THE BATTLE WAS FOUGHT," ETC.

New York
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
LONDON: MACMILLAN & CO., LTD.
1905

Set up and electrotyped. Published June, 1905.

Norwood Press

J. S. Cushing & Co.—Berwick & Smith Co.

Norwood, Mass., U.S.A.

THE STORM CENTRE [Pg 1]

CHAPTER I

The place reminded him then and later of the storm centre of a cyclone. Outside the tempests of Civil War raged. He could hear, as he sat in the quiet, book-lined room, the turbulent drums fitfully beating in tented camps far down the Tennessee River. Through the broad, old-fashioned window he saw the purple hills opposite begin to glow with a myriad of golden gleams, pulsing like fireflies, that told of thousands of troops in bivouac. He read the mystic message of the signal lights, shining with a different lustre, moving athwart the eminence, then back again, expunged in blackness as a fort across the river flashed out an answer. A military band was playing at headquarters, down in the night-begloomed town, and now and again the great blare of the brasses came widely surging on the raw vernal gusts. In the shadowy grove in front of this suburban home his own battery of horse-artillery was parked. It had earlier made its way over many an obstacle, and, oddly enough, through its agency he was recently enabled to penetrate the exclusive reserve of this Southern household, always hitherto coldly aloof and averse to the invader. [Pg 2]

He had chanced to send a pencilled message on his card to the mansion. It merely expressed a warning to lift the sashes of the windows during the trial practice of a new gun, lest in the firing the glass be shattered by the concussion of the air. His name was unusual, and seeing it on the card recalled many pleasant reminiscences to the mind of old Judge Roscoe. Another "Fluellen Baynell" had been his college chum, and inquiry developed the fact that this Federal captain of artillery was the son of this ancient friend. An interchange of calls ensued. And here sat Captain Baynell in the storm centre, the quiet of evening closing in, the lamp on the table serenely aglow, the wood fire flashing on the high brass andirons and fender, the lion delineated on the velvet rug respectfully crouching beneath his feet. But in this suave environment he was beginning to feel somewhat embarrassed, for the old colored servant who had admitted him and replenished the fire, and whom he had politely greeted as "Uncle Ephraim," in deference to his age, now loitered, volubly criticising the unseen, unknown inmates of the house, who would probably overhear, for at any moment the big oak door might usher them into the room.

His excuses for his master's delay to appear absorbed but little time, and he assiduously [Pg 3] brushed the polished stone hearth with a turkey wing to justify his lingering in conversation with the guest. Unexpected business had called Judge Roscoe to the town, thus preventing him from being present upon the arrival of Captain Baynell, invited to partake of tea *en famille*.

"But den, he 'lowed dat Miss Leonora—dat's Mrs. Gwynn, his niece, a widder 'oman—would be ready, but Marster mought hev' knowed dat Miss Leonora ain't never ready for nuffin till day arter ter-morrow! Den dere's de ladies—dey hes been dressin' fur ye fur better dan an hour. But shucks! de ladies is so vain dat dey is jus' ez liable ter keep on dressin' fur anodder hour yit!"

This was indubitably flattering information; but Captain Baynell, a blond man of thirty, of a military stiffness in his brilliant uniform, and of a most uncompromising dignity, glanced with an uneasy monition at the door, a trifle ajar. He was sensible, notwithstanding, of an unusually genial glow of expectation. The rude society of camps was unacceptable to a man of his exacting temperament, and, the sentiment of the country being so adverse to the cause he represented, he had had scant opportunities here to enter social circles of the grade that would elsewhere have welcomed him. He had not adequately realized how he had missed these refinements and felt the deprivation of his isolation till the moment of meeting the ladies of Judge Roscoe's household was at hand. He had hardly expected, however, to [Pg 4] create so great a flutter amongst them, and he was at once secretly elated and disdainful.

Although a stranger to the ladies, the officer was well known to the old servant. The guns had hardly been unlimbered in the beautiful grove in front of the house ere the ancient slave had appeared in the camp to express his ebullient patriotism, to thank his liberators for his freedom,—for this was the result of the advance of the Federal army, a military measure and not as yet a legal enactment.

Despite his exuberant rhetoric, there was something tenuous about his fervent protestations, and the fact that he still adhered to his master's service suggested a devotion to the old régime incongruous with his loudly proclaimed welcome of the new day.

"Why don't you leave your servitude, then, Uncle Ephraim?" one of the younger officers had tentatively asked him.

"Dat is jes' whut I say!" diplomatically replied Uncle Ephraim, who thus came to be called "the double-faced Janus."

Now indeed, instead of a vaunt of liberty, he was disposed to apologize, for the sake of the credit of the house, that there were no more slaves to make a braver show in servitude.

"Dey ain't got no butler now,—he's in a restauroar up north,—nor no car'age driver; dat fool nigger went off wid de Union army, an' got killed in a scrimmage. He would hev' stayed wid [Pg 5] Marster, dough, if de Fed'ral folks hedn't tuk de hosses off wid de cavalry; he 'lowed he wuz too lonesome yere, wid jes' nuffin' but two-footed cattle ter 'sociate wid."

Once more he whisked the turkey wing along the clean, smooth hearth; then, still on his knees before the fire, he again addressed himself to the explanations he deemed fit as to the reduced status of his master's household.

"Me an' my wife is all de servants dey got now—she's Chaney, de cook in de kitchen. Dey hatter scuse me, fur I never waited in de house afore. No, sah! jes' a wuckin' hand; jes' a cawnfield hand, out'n de cawnfield straight!"

Whisk went the turkey wing.

"Dat's whut I tell Miss Leonora,—dat's Mrs. Gwynn, de widder 'oman, Marster's niece whut's been takin' keer ob de house yere sence his wife died,—I say I dunno no better when I break de dishes, an' Miss Leonora, she say a b'ar outer a holler tree would know better. Yah! yah!"

The officer, feeling these domestic confidences a burden, began to scrutinize with an appearance of interest the Dresden china shepherd and shepherdess at either end of the tall white wooden mantelpiece, and then the clock of the same ware in the centre.

Old Janus mistook the nature of his motive. "'Tis gittin' late fur shore! Gawd! dem ladies is a- [Pg 6]
dressin' an' a-dressin' yit! It's a pity Miss Leonora—dat's de widder 'oman—don't fix *herself* up some; looks ole, fur true, similar to a ole gran'mammy of a 'oman. But, sah, whut did she ever marry dat man fur?"

Captain Baynell, in the stress of an unusual embarrassment, rose and walked to one of the tall book-cases, affecting to examine the title of a long row of books, but the old servant was not sensitive; he resorted to the simple expedient of raising his voice to follow the guest in a detail that brought Captain Baynell back to his chair in unseemly haste, where a lower tone was practicable.

"She could hev' married my Marster's son, Julius, an' him de flower ob de flock! But no! She jus' would marry dis yere Gwynn feller, whut nobody wanted her ter marry, an' eloped wid him—she did! An' shore 'nuff, dey do say he pulled her round de house by de hair ob her head, dough some 'lows he jus' bruk a chair ober her head!"

The officer was a brave man, but now he was in the extremity of panic. What if some one were at the door on the point of entering?—the "widder 'oman" herself, for instance!

"I don't need you any longer, Uncle Ephraim," he ventured to remonstrate.

"I'm gwine, Cap'n, jus' as soon as I git through wid de ha'th," and Uncle Ephraim gave it a perfunctory whisk.

He interpolated an explanation of his diligence. "I don't want Miss Leonora—dat's de widder [Pg 7]
'oman—ter be remarkin' on it. Nobody kin do nuthin' ter suit her but Chaney, dis cook dey got, who belong ter Miss Leonora, an' befo' de War used ter be her waitin'-'oman. Chaney is all de estate Miss Leonora hes got lef,—an' ye know dat sort o' property ain't wurf much in dis happy day o' freedom. Miss Leonora wuz rich once in her own right. But she flung her marriage-settlements—dat dey had fixed to tie up her property so Gwynn couldn't sell it nor waste it—right inter de fiah! She declared she would marry a man whut she could trust wid her fortune! An'," the narrator concluded his story impressively, "when dat man died—his horse throwed him an' bruk his neck—I wondered dey didn't beat de drum fur joy, 'twuz sich a crownin' mercy! But he hed spent all her fortune 'fore he went!"

The whisking wing was still; Uncle Ephraim's eyes dwelt on the fire with a glow of deep speculation. He lowered his voice mysteriously.

"Dat man wuz de poorest stuff ter make an angel out'n ever you see! I dunno *whut's* become of him."

There was a stir outside, a footfall; and, as Captain Baynell sprang to his feet, feeling curiously guilty in receiving, however unwillingly, these revelations of the history of the family, Judge Roscoe entered, his welcome the more cordial and expressed because he [Pg 8]
noticed a certain constraint in his guest's manner, which he ascribed to the unintentional breach of decorum in the failure to properly receive him.

"I had hoped my niece, Mrs. Gwynn, might have been here to save you a dull half hour, or perhaps my granddaughters—where are the ladies and Mrs. Gwynn, Ephraim?" he broke off to ask of "the double-faced Janus," scuttling out with his basket of chips and his turkey wing.

"De ladies is dressin' ter see de company," replied Janus, with a grin wide enough to decorate both his faces. "Miss Leonora, she is helpin' 'em!"

Captain Baynell experienced renewed embarrassment, but Judge Roscoe laughed with obvious relish.

The host, pale, thin, nervous, old, was of a type ill calculated to endure the stress of excitement and turmoil of incident of the Civil War; indeed, he might have succumbed utterly in the mortality of the aged, so general at that period, but for the incongruous rest and inaction of the storm centre. The town was heavily garrisoned by the Federal forces; the firing line was far afield. He had two sons in the Confederate army, but too distant for news, for speculation, for aught but anxiety and prayer. The elder of them was a widower, the father of "the ladies," and hence in his absence Judge Roscoe's charge of his [Pg 9]
granddaughters.

The phrase "the ladies and Mrs. Gwynn" grated on Captain Baynell. It seemed incongruous with the punctilious old Southern gentleman to make a discourteous distinction thus between his granddaughters and his niece. Baynell dated his sympathy with her from that moment. However old and faded and reduced the house-keeperish "widder 'oman" might be, it was an affront to thus segregate her. He felt an antagonism toward "the ladies" in their exclusive aristocratic designation even before he heard the first dainty touch of their slippered feet upon the great stairway, or a gush of fairylike treble laughter. As a silken rustle along the hall heralded their bedizened approach, he arose ceremoniously to greet them.

The door flew open with a wide swing; his eyes rested on nothing beyond, for he was looking two feet over range. There rushed into the room three little girls, six and eight years of age, all hanging back for a moment till their grandfather's encouraging "Come, ladies!" nerved them for the introduction of Captain Baynell. Although sensible of a deep disappointment

and a sudden cessation of interest in the storm centre, he could hardly refrain from laughing at the downfall of his own confident expectations.

Yet "the ladies," in their way, were well worth looking at, and their diligent care of their toilette had not been in vain. The two younger ones were twins, very rosy, with golden hair, [Pg 10] delicately curled and perfumed. The other was far more beautiful than either. Her hair was of a chestnut hue; her dark blue eyes were eloquent with meaning—"speaking eyes." She had an exquisitely fair complexion and an entrancing smile, and amidst the twittering words and fluttering laughter of the others she was silent; it was a sinister, weighty, significant silence.

"A deaf mute," her grandfather explained with a note of pathos and pain.

Captain Baynell's acceptance of the fact had the requisite touch of sympathy and interest, but no more. How could he imagine that the child's infirmity could ever concern him, could be a factor of import in the most notable crisis of his life!

Indeed, he might have forgotten it within the hour had naught else riveted his attention to the house. He had begun to look forward to a dull evening,—the reaction from the expectation of charming feminine society of a congenial age. "The ladies" failed in that particular, lovely though they were in the quaint costumes of the day, the golden-haired twins respectively in faint blue and dark red "satin faced" merino, the brown-haired child in rich orange. Over their bodices all three wore sheer spencers of embroidered Swiss muslin, with embroidered ruffles below the waist line. This was encircled with silken sashes, the tint [Pg 11] of their gowns. The skirts were short, showing long, white, clocked stockings and red morocco slippers with elastic crossing the instep. The trio were swift in making advances into friendship, and soon were swarming about the officer, counting his shining buttons with great particularity, and squealing with greedy delight when an unexpected row was discovered on the seam of each of his sleeves.

As the door again opened, the very aspect of the room altered—a new presence pervaded the life of Fluellen Baynell that made the idea of strife indeed alien, aloof; the past a forgotten trifle; the future remote, in indifferent abeyance, and the momentous present the chief experience of his existence. It was partially the effect of surprise, although other elements exerted a potent influence.

Instead of the forlorn, faded "widder 'oman" of his fancy, there appeared a girlish shape, whose young, fair face was a magnet to all the romance within him. What mattered it with such beauty that the expression was a dreary lassitude, the pose indifference, the garb a shabby black dress worn with no touch of distinction, no thought, no care for appearances. As he rose, with "the ladies" affectionately clinging about him, and bowed low in the moment of introduction, his searching eyes discerned every minute detail. It was like a sun picture upon his consciousness, realized and fixed in his mind as if he had known it forever. And [Pg 12] with a sudden ignoble recollection his face flushed from his forehead to his high military collar. Was it her hair, the old gossip had said, or was it a chair?

It was impossible to look at her without noticing her hair. A rich, golden brown, it waved back from her white brow in heavy undulations, caught and coiled in a great glittering knot at the back of her head, with no ornament, simplicity itself. Certainly, he reflected, no preparations were in progress in this quarter for his captivation. One of the ready-made crape collars of the period was about her neck, the delicate, fine contour of her throat displayed by the cut of her dress. Her luminous gray eyes, with their long black lashes, cast upon him a mere glance, cool, casual, unfriendly, it might even seem, if it were worth her languid while.

He sought to win her to some demonstration of interest when they were presently at table, with old Janus skirmishing about the dining room with a silver salver, hindering the meal rather than serving it. Only conventional courtesy characterized her, although she gave Baynell a radiant smile when offering a second cup of tea; an official smile, so to speak, strictly appertaining to her pose as hostess, as she sat behind the massive silver tea service that had been in the Roscoe family for many years.

She left the conversation almost wholly to the gentlemen when they had returned to the [Pg 13] library. Quiescent, inexpressive, she leaned back in a great arm-chair, her beautiful eyes fixed reflectively on the fire. The three "ladies," on a small sofa, apparently listened too, the little dumb girl seeming the most attentive of the trio, to the half-hearted, guarded, diplomatic discussion of politics, such as was possible in polite society to men of opposing factions in those heady, bitter days. Only once, when Baynell was detailing the names of his brothers to gratify Judge Roscoe's interest in the family of his ancient friend, did Mrs. Gwynn suggest her individuality. She suddenly rose.

"You would like to see the portraits of Judge Roscoe's sons," she said as definitely as if he had asked this privilege. It may not have been the fact, but Baynell felt that she was making amends to the absent for the apostasy of "entertaining a Yankee officer," as the phrase went in that day, by exhibiting with pride their cherished images and forcing him to perform polite homage before them.

He meekly followed, however, as she took from a wide-mouthed jar on the table a handful of tapers, made of rolled paper, and, lighting one at the fire, led the way across the wide hall

and into the cold, drear gloom of the drawing-rooms. There in the dim light from the hall chandelier, shining through the open door, she flitted from lamp to lamp, and instantly there was a chill, white glitter throughout the great apartments, showing the floriated velvet [Pg 14] carpets, affected at that time, the carved rosewood furniture upholstered with satin damask of green and gold, the lambrequins of a harmonizing brocade and lace curtains at the windows, the grand piano, and marble-topped tables, and on the walls a great inexpressive mirror, above each of the white marble mantelpieces, and some large oil paintings, chiefly the portraits of the family.

The three "ladies" gathered under the picture of their father with the fervor of pilgrims at a votive shrine. Clarence Roscoe's portrait seemed to gaze down at them smilingly. He it was who had given his little daughters their quaint, formal sobriquet of "the ladies," the phrase seriously accepted by others, until no longer recognized as a nickname. Suddenly the deaf mute rushed back to officiously claim the officer's attention. Her brilliant eyes were aglow; the fascination of her smile transfigured her face; she was now gazing at another portrait. This was of a very young man, extraordinarily handsome, in full Confederate uniform, and, carrying her hand to her forehead with the most spirited air imaginable, she gave the military salute.

"That is her sign for Julius," cried Mrs. Gwynn, delightedly. "We have seen many armies with banners, but Julius is her ideal of a soldier, and the only one in all the world whom she distinguishes by the military salute."

"My younger son," explained Judge Roscoe; while "the ladies" with their quick transitions [Pg 15] from subject to subject were sidling about the rooms, sinking their feet as deep as possible into the soft pile of the velvet carpets, and feeling with their slim fingers the rich gloss of the satin damask coverings, complacent in the consciousness that it was all very fine and revelling in a sense of luxury. Poor little ladies!

But Mrs. Gwynn with a word presently sent them scuttling back to the warmth of the library. As she began to extinguish the lamps Baynell offered to assist. She accepted civilly, of course, but with the unnoting, casual acquiescence that had begun to pique him, and as they closed the door upon the shadowy deserted apartments he thought they were of a grewsome favor, that the evening was of an untoward drift, and he lingered only for the conventional interval after returning to the library before he took his leave.

As the door closed after him he noted that the stars were in the dark sky. The wind was laid. The lights in the many camps had all disappeared, for "taps" had sounded. Now and again in close succession he heard the clocks in divers towers in Roanoke City striking the hour. There was no token of military occupation in all the land, save that from far away on a turnpike toward the dark west came the dull continuous roll of wagon wheels as an endless forage train made its way into the town; and as he passed out of the portico, a sentry posted [Pg 16] on the gravelled drive in front of the house challenged him. He had ordered a guard to be stationed there for its protection against wandering marauders, so remote was the place. He gave the countersign, and took his way down through the great oak and tulip trees of the grove that his authority had also been exerted to preserve. His father's old friend had this claim upon his courtesy, he felt, for century oaks cannot be replaced in a fortnight, and without them the home would indeed be bereft.

Thinking still of the placid storm centre, Leonora Gwynn's face was continually in his mind; the tones of her voice echoed in his revery. And then suddenly he heard his step ringing on the frosty ground with a new spirit; he felt his finger tips tingle; his face glowed with rancor. The man was dead, and this indeed was well! But—profane thought! was it her hair? her beautiful hair? "The coward! the despicable villain!" he called aloud between his set teeth.

CHAPTER II [Pg 17]

The next day naught of interest would Baynell detail of his venture into the storm centre. His invitation to the house of Judge Roscoe, somewhat noted for the vigor of his rebellious sentiments, resentful, implacable, even heady in the assumptions of his age, had roused the curiosity of Baynell's two most intimate friends concerning the traits of that secluded inner exclusive circle which only the accident of ancient association had enabled him to penetrate. In the tedium of camp routine even slight matters were of interest, and it was the habit of the three to compare notes and relate for mutual entertainment their varied experiences since last they had met.

The battery of six pieces which Baynell commanded enjoyed a certain renown as a crack corps, and spectators were gathering to witness the gun-drill,—a number of soldiers from the adjoining cavalry and infantry camps, a few of the railroad hands from the repair work on a neighboring track, and a contingent of freedmen, jubilantly idle. Standing a little apart from these was a group, chiefly mounted, consisting of several officers of the different arms

of the service, military experts, critically observant, among whom was Colonel Vertnor Ashley, who commanded a volunteer regiment of horse, and a younger man, Lieutenant Seymour of the infantry. [Pg 18]

It was a fine fresh morning, with white clouds scudding across a densely blue sky chased by the wind, the grass springing into richer verdure, the buds bourgeoning, with almost the effect of leaflets already, in the great oak and tulip trees of the grove. Daffodils were blooming here and there, scattered throughout the sward,—even beneath the carriages of the guns a score perhaps, untrampled still, reared aloft the golden "candlesticks" with an illuminating effect. The warm sun was flashing with an embellishing glitter on the rows of the white tents of the army on the hills around the little city as far as the eye could reach. The deep, broad river, here and there dazzling with lustrous stretches of ripples, was full of craft,—coal-barges, skiffs, gunboats, the ordinary steam-packets, flatboats, and rafts; the peculiar dull roar of a railway train heavily laden, transporting troops, came to the ear as the engine, shrieking like a monster, rushed upon the bridge with its great consignment of crowded humanity in the long line of box cars, an additional locomotive assisting the speed of the transit.

"Come here, Ashley, and see if you can make anything of Baynell," said the infantry lieutenant, whose regiment lay in camp a little to the west, as the colonel reined in his horse [Pg 19] under the tree where Seymour was hanging on to Baynell's stirrup-leather. "He hasn't a syllable to say. I want to know what is the name of that pretty girl at Judge Roscoe's."

Ashley came riding up with his inimitable pompous swagger, half the result of jocose bravado, half of genuine and justifiable vanity. It went very well with the suggestions of his high cavalry boots, his clanking sword, and his jingling spurs. His somewhat broad ruddy face had the merit of a sidelong glance of great archness, delivered from a pair of vivacious hazel eyes, and he twirled his handsome, long, dark mustache with the air of a conqueror at the very mention of a pretty girl.

"I can tell you more about Judge Roscoe's family than Fluellen Baynell ever will," Ashley declared gayly. "So ask *me* what you want to know, Mark, and don't intrude on Nellie's finical delicacy."

Throughout the campaign Colonel Ashley's squadrons had coöperated with Baynell's artillery. The officers had come to know and respect each other well in the stress of danger and mutual dependence. It may be doubted whether any other man alive could with impunity have called Fluellen Baynell "Nellie."

Baynell was in full uniform, splendidly mounted, awaiting the hour appointed, and now and again casting his eye on the camp "street" at some distance, the stable precincts all a [Pg 20] turmoil of hurrying drivers and artillerymen harnessing horses and adjusting accoutrements, while a continuous hum of voices, jangling of metal, and tramping of steeds came on the air. He withdrew his attention with an effort.

"Why, what do you want me to tell?" he demanded sarcastically;—"what they had for supper?"

"No—no—but just be neighborly. For sheer curiosity I want to know his daughter's name," persisted the lieutenant of infantry.

"Judge Roscoe has no daughter," replied Baynell.

"His granddaughter, then."

"His granddaughters are children—I have forgotten their names."

"Well, *who* is that young lady there?—a beauty of beauties. I caught a glimpse of her at the window the day we pitched our camp in the peach orchard over there."

"She is the most beautiful girl I have ever seen," solemnly declared Ashley, who had artistic proclivities. "I never saw a face like that—such chiselling, so perfect—unless it were some fine antique cameo. It has the contour, the lines, the dignity, of a Diana! And her hair is really exquisite! Who is she, Fluellen?"

Baynell was conscious of the constraint very perceptible in his voice as he replied, "She is Judge Roscoe's niece, Mrs. Gwynn."

Ashley stared. "*Mrs.!* Why, she doesn't look twenty years old!" Then, with sudden [Pg 21] illumination, "Why—that must be the '*widder 'oman!*'" with an unctuous imitation of old Ephraim's elocution. "I *am* surprised. Mrs. Gwynn! 'De widder 'oman!'" He broke off to laugh at a sudden recollection.

"I wish you could have heard old Janus's account of his effort to clean the knives to suit her. She seems to be in command of the commissariat up there. The old darkey came into camp, searching for the methods of polishing metals that the soldiers use for their accoutrements. 'Brilliancy without labor,' was Uncle Ephraim's desideratum. I gave him some rotten-stone. His sketch of how the judgment day would overtake him still polishing knives for the 'widder 'oman' was worth hearing."

Baynell would not have so considered it—thus far apart were the friends in prejudice and

temperament. Yet there was no derogation in the simple gossip. To the campaigners the Roscoe household was but the temporary incident of the mental landscape, and the confidential bit of criticism and comment served only to make conversation and pass the time.

All of Vertnor Ashley's traits were on a broad scale, genial and open. He had the best opinion imaginable of himself, and somehow the world shared it—so ingratiating was his joviality. His very defects were obviated and went for naught. Although, being only of middle [Pg 22] height, his tendency to portliness threatened the grace of his proportions, he was esteemed a fine figure and a handsome man. He made a brave show in the saddle, and was a magnificent presentment of a horseman. He was a poor drill; his discipline was lax, for he dearly loved popularity and fostered this incense to his vanity. He was adored in his regiment, and he never put foot in stirrup to ride in or out of camp that even this casual appearance was not cheered to the echo. "That must be Vert Ashley, or a rabbit!" was a usual speculation upon the sound of sudden shouting, for the opportunity to chase a rabbit was a precious break in the monotony of the life of the rank and file.

Baynell's coming and going, on the contrary, was greeted with no demonstration. He was a rigid disciplinarian. He exacted every capacity for work that the men possessed, and his battery was one of the most efficient of the horse artillery in the service. But when it came to the test of battle, the cannoneers could not shout loud and long enough. They were sure of fine execution and yet of careful avoidance of the reckless sacrifice of their lives and the capture of their guns, often returning, indeed, from action, covered with glory, having lost not one man, not so much as a sponge-staff. So fine an officer could well dispense with the arts that fostered popularity and ministered to vanity. Thus the slightest peccadillo made the [Pg 23] offender and the wooden horse acquaint.

None of Baynell's qualities were of the jovial order. He was a martinet, a technical expert in the science of gunnery, a stern and martial leader of men. His mind was an orderly assimilation of valuable information, his consciousness a repelling exclusive assortment of sensitive fibres. He had a high and exacting moral sense, and his pride of many various kinds passed all bounds. He listened with aghast dismay to the story of Mrs. Gwynn's unhappy married life that Ashley rehearsed,—the ordinary gossip of the day, to be heard everywhere,—and then a discussion took place as to whether or not the horse that killed her husband were the vicious charger now ridden by the colonel of a certain regiment.

"It couldn't be," said Ashley, "that happened nearly a year ago."

This talk hung on for a long time, as it seemed to Baynell. Yet he did not welcome its conclusion, for a greater source of irritation was to come.

"But now that you have a footing there, Fluellen, I want you to introduce me," said Colonel Ashley, who was a person of consideration in high and select circles at home, and spoke easily from the vantage-ground of an acknowledged social position. "I should be glad to meet Mrs. Gwynn. I never saw any one whose appearance so impressed me."

"Take me with you when you two call," the lieutenant, all unprescient, interjected casually. [Pg 24] The next moment he was flushing angrily, for, impossible as it seemed, Baynell was declining in set terms.

"My footing there would not justify me in asking to introduce my friends," he said. "I should be afraid of a refusal."

Ashley, too, cast a swift, indignant glance upon him. Then, "I'll risk it," he said easily; for ill-humor with him was "about face" so suddenly that it was hardly to be recognized.

Baynell showed a stiff distaste for the persistence, but maintained his position.

"Judge Roscoe made it plain that it was only for the sake of his friendship with my father that he offered any civility to me—no concession politically. My status as an officer of the 'Yankee army' is an offence and a stumbling-block to him."

"Bless his fire-eating soul! I don't want to convert him from his treason. I desire only to call on the lady."

"I myself could not call on Mrs. Gwynn," protested Baynell. "She hardly spoke a word to me."

"It will be quite sufficient for her to listen to me," laughed Ashley.

"She took only the most casual notice of my presence—barely to give me a cup of tea."

"Now, Baynell," said the lieutenant, exceedingly wroth. "I want you to understand that I take [Pg 25] this very ill of you."

He was a tall, spare young fellow, with light, straight brown hair, a light-brown mustache, and a keen, excitable blue eye, which showed well-opened and alert from under the dark brim of his cap as he looked upward, still standing at the side of Baynell's restive horse. "I think it a very poor return for similar courtesy. I took *you* with me to call on Miss Fisher—and—"

"This is a very different case. I, personally, am not on terms with Mrs. Gwynn. Besides, she

is very different from Miss Fisher, who entertains general society. Mrs. Gwynn is a widow—in deep mourning."

"But it *is* told in Gath that widows are not usually inconsolable," suggested Ashley, with a brightening of his arch eyes, and still laughing it off.

"I am much affronted, Captain Baynell," declared the irascible lieutenant. "I consider this personal. And I will get even with you for this!"

"And I will get an introduction to Mrs. Gwynn without your kind offices," declared Ashley, with a jocular imitation of their young friend's indignant manner.

"I shall be very happy if you can meet her in any appropriate way. It is not appropriate for me, cognizant of their ardent rebel sympathies and intense antagonism to the Union cause and antipathy to all its supporters, to ask to introduce my friends of the invading 'Yankee army,'" Baynell replied with stiff hauteur. [Pg 26]

Just then the bugle sang out, its mandatory, clear, golden tones lifting into the sunshine with such a full buoyant effect that it was like the very spirit of martial courage transmuted into sound. Baynell instantly put his horse into motion, and rode off through the brilliant air and the sparse shadows of the budding trees. His blond hair and mustache, gilded by the sunlight, had as decorative an effect as his gold lace; his blue eyes glittered with a stern, vigilant light; his face was flushed, something unusual, for he was wont to be pale, and his erect, imposing, soldierly figure sat his spirited young charger with the firmness of a centaur. The eyes of all the group followed him, several commenting on his handsome appearance, his fine bearing, his splendid horse, and his great value as an officer.

"He is an admirable fellow," declared Dr. Grindley, a surgeon on his way to the hospital hard by. He had paused at a little distance, and had not heard the conversation.

"If he were not such a prig," Ashley assented dubiously. "Such an uncompromising stickler on trifles! Any other man in the world would have slurred the matter over, and never kept the promise of the introduction. If inconvenient or undesirable, he might have postponed the call indefinitely."

"He is a most confounded prig," said Lieutenant Seymour, in great irritation. [Pg 27]

"Baynell must have everything out—to the bitter end," said Ashley.

"I'd like to break his head! I'd like to break his face—with my fist," exclaimed the lieutenant, petulantly, clenching his hand again and again. He detailed the tenor of the conversation to the surgeon as the group watched the manœuvring battery. "Isn't that a dog-in-the-manger-ish trick, Dr. Grindley? He wants to keep his Roscoes to himself. Mrs. Gwynn won't speak to him, and so he wants nobody else to go there whom she *might* speak to!"

Baynell, still uncomfortably conscious of the rancor he had roused, had taken his position in the centre, just the regulation twelve paces in front of the leading horses, with the music four paces distant from the right of the first gun. As the sound blared out gayly on the crisp, clear, vernal breeze, the glittering ranks, every soldier mounted on a strong, fresh steed, moved forward swiftly, with the gun-carriages and caissons each drawn by a team of six horses. The air was full of the tramp of hoofs and the clangor of heavy, revolving wheels, ever and anon punctuated by the sharp monition, "Obstacle!" as one of the giant oaks of the grove intervened and the direction of the march of a piece was obliqued. The efficiency of the battery was very evident. The drill was almost perfect, despite the difficulty of [Pg 28] manœuvring among the trees. But when the ranks passed from the grove they swept like a whirlwind over the open spaces of the adjoining pasture-lands, the whole battery swinging here and there in sharp turns, never losing the prescribed intervals of the relative distance of squads, and guns, and caissons—all like some single intricate piece of connected mechanism, impossible of disassociation in its several parts. Ever and anon the clear tenor tones of the captain rang out with a trumpet-like effect, and the refrain of the subalterns and non-commissioned officers commanding the sections followed in their various clamors, while the great whirling congeries of horses and men and wheels and guns obeyed the sound like some automatic creation of the ingenuity of man. Once the surgeon bent an attentive ear.

"By sections—break from the right to march to left!" called the commander, with a sudden "catch" in the tones.

"Caissons forward! Trot! March!" came from a different voice.

"Section forward, guide left!" thundered a basso profundo.

"March!" cried the captain, sharply.

"March!" came the subaltern's echo.

As the moving panorama turned and wheeled and shifted, the surgeon commented in a spirit of forecast:—

"If that fellow doesn't pay some attention to his bronchial tubes, they will pay some attention to him, and that promptly." [Pg 29]

So promptly indeed was this prophecy verified that within the next few days old Ephraim,

who purveyed all the news of the period to the remote secluded country house, informed Judge Roscoe that Captain Baynell was seriously ill with bronchitis and threatened with pneumonia. In order to have indoor protection and treatment he was to be removed as soon as possible to the hospital near the town. Judge Roscoe verified this rumor upon hastening to camp, and with hospitable warmth he invited the son of his old schoolmate to sojourn instead in his house; for in the college days to which he was fond of recurring he had been taken into the home of the elder Fluellen Baynell, and nursed by his friend's mother through a typhoid attack. To repay the obligation thus was peculiarly acceptable to a man of his type. But Baynell hardly heeded the detail of the hospitable precedent. He needed no persuasion, and thereafter he seemed more than ever lapsed in the serenities of the storm centre, ensconced in one of the great square upper bedrooms, with the spare furnishing of heavy mahogany that gave an idea of so much space, the order of the day when the plethora of decoration, the "cosy corner," the wall pocket, the "art drapery," the crowded knickknackery, did not obtain. For more than a week Baynell could not rise; the surgeon visited him at regular intervals, and Judge Roscoe appeared unfailingly each morning in the sick room; but the rest of the family remained invisible, and held unsympathetically aloof. [Pg 30]

This was a shrewd loss to Ashley, for although he had called at first with genuine anxiety as to his friend's state, the humors of the situation appealed to him as time wore on, and he recollected with the enhanced interest of enforced idleness his boast that he would compass an introduction to Mrs. Gwynn, despite Baynell's stiff refusal. Seymour still resented the circumstance so seriously that he had withheld all manifestations of sympathy or concern, and this, the kind Ashley considered, carried the matter much too far. He thought it might effect a general reconciliation if he should meet Mrs. Gwynn by accident, when he fancied he would not fear to introduce any one whom he considered fit for good society. Thus, after he had ceased to be apprehensive concerning Baynell's condition, he called on him again and again, but hearing never a light footfall on the stair or the flutter of flounces that might promise a realization of his quest. He was all unconscious that his project had an unwitting ally in Judge Roscoe himself. For more than once Judge Roscoe was uncomfortably visited by hospitable monitions.

"I should have liked to ask Colonel Ashley to dine with us," he said tentatively to Mrs. Gwynn. "He was leaving the house just as the meal was being served. Old Ephraim—confound the old fellow—has no sort of tact. He brought in the soup to Captain Baynell with Colonel Ashley sitting by the bedside! It was indeed a hint to beat a retreat. I was—I was mortified. I was really mortified not to ask him to stay." [Pg 31]

"Heavens, Uncle Gerald!—what are you dreaming about? Ask people to dine, and no trained servant to wait on the table—and this china—and the ladies in their pinafores!" And Mrs. Gwynn glanced scoffingly around the domestic board, for the place had once been famous for the elegance of its entertainments; but the balls, the "wine suppers," the formal late dinners of many courses, had come to an end with the conclusion of the period of prosperity, and the perfectly trained service had vanished with the vanishing butler and his corps of assistants whom he himself had rigorously drilled in the school of the pantry, in strict accordance with old traditions.

"Well, we have better china," said the judge, inexorably. "And the pinafores don't grow on the ladies; we have excellent precedent for believing they can be dispensed with."

Mrs. Gwynn fixed him with a resolute eye. "I don't intend to have the ladies taken from their studies in the forenoon to dress for company and distract their minds with fascinating gentlemen. Besides it is too great a compliment to receive an absolute stranger informally, as one of ourselves,—as we treat Captain Baynell,—and it is almost impossible to entertain Colonel Ashley otherwise. You forget that we have no trained servants. And I am not going to trust the handling of my aunt's beautiful old Sèvres dinner set to our inexperienced factotum—oh, the idea! It makes me shudder to think of the nicks and smashings. It ought to be kept intact for Julius's wife when he takes one, or for Clarence's if he should ever marry again. A stray Yankee officer isn't sufficient justification for risking it." [Pg 32]

"He has called so often, and has been so kind to Captain Baynell."

"Well, so have I been kind to Captain Baynell, and here am I eating on the everyday china—no Sèvres for me! And I am going to be kinder still, for he is allowed to have some dessert to-day, and I have spread this tray with mine own hands."

She touched a call-bell, and, as old Janus appeared, "Take this tray upstairs to Captain Baynell," she said, as she transferred it, "be careful—don't tilt it so!" Then, as the old servant left the room, she resumed, addressing Judge Roscoe: "You can sentimentalize about your precious Captain Baynell, if you like, on the score of old friendship. I can appreciate the claims of old friendship, especially as he has been so ill, and possibly was better off here than at the hospital. But to go in generally for entertaining Yankee officers,—and all our near and dear out yonder in those cold wet trenches, half starved, and ragged, and wounded, and dying,—indeed, no! For my own part, I couldn't be induced to spread a board for another one, except at the point of the bayonet." [Pg 33]

"Colonel Ashley don't wear no bayonet," interposed Adelaide, glibly.

"He's got him a sword," acceded Geraldine.

"A long sword, clickety-clank," suggested the first "lady."

"Clickety, clickety-clank," echoed the other, with brightening eyes.

"Don't eat with your fingers—nor the spoon; take the fork." Mrs. Gwynn's admonitory aside was hardly an interruption.

"That is a very narrow view, Leonora," the judge contended. "There can be no parity between the fervor of convictions on the issues of a great national question and merely human predilections as between individuals. Patriotism is not license for rancor. I have shown my devotion to the Southern cause. I have risked the lives of my dear, dear sons. I have expended much in its interests; I have endangered and lost my fortune. The future of all I hold dear is in jeopardy in many aspects. But I *do not* feel bound for that reason to hate individually every fellow-creature who has opposite convictions, to which he has a right, and takes up arms to sustain them."

"Well—*I do*! Being a woman, and having no reasoning capacities, there is no necessity for me to be logical on the subject. I feel what I feel, without qualification. And I know what I know without either legal proof or ocular demonstration. You are welcome to your intellect, Uncle Gerald! Much good may it do you! Intuition is enough for me. Meantime the Sèvres is safe on the shelves." [Pg 34]

Beaten from the field as Judge Roscoe must needs be when his vaunted ratiocination was no available weapon, he held stanchly nevertheless to his own opinion, helpless though he was in the domestic administration. He adopted such measures as were practicable to comport with his own view. Flattered by Ashley's interest in Baynell and recognizant of the frequency of his visits, never dreaming that a glimpse of Mrs. Gwynn was their ultimate object, he took occasion to offer him such slight courtesies as opportunity presented.

One day when they were descending the stairs Judge Roscoe chanced to comment on the fine bouquet of a certain choice old wine. He still hoarded a few costly bottles of an ancient importation, and with a sudden thought he insisted on pausing in the library to take a glass and finish a discussion happily begun by the invalid's bedside. The room was vacant, as the colonel's keen glance swiftly assured him, and the judge's order for wine was inaugurated through the bell-cord, which jangling summons old Ephraim answered somewhat procrastinatingly. The expression of surprise in the old darkey's eyes, even admonitory dissuasion, as he hearkened to the demand, very definitely nettled the judge and secretly amused Ashley, who divined the old servitor's doubts as to gaining the permission of "de widder 'oman." The host was more relieved than he cared to acknowledge to himself when the factotum presently reappeared, bearing a tray, with the old-fashioned red-and-white Bohemian wine-glasses and decanter which contained the rare vintage, and he felt with a sigh that he was still supreme in his own house, despite the sway of Mrs. Gwynn. He recognized the more gratefully, however, her influence in the perfection of the service and the solemnly careful, preternaturally watchful step of old Ephraim, as he bore about the delicate glass with all the effect of treading on eggs,—finally depositing it on the table and withdrawing at his habitual plunging gait. [Pg 35]

Although Ashley dawdled as he listened and sipped his wine languorously, no rustle of draperies rewarded his attentive ear, no graceful presence gladdened his expectant eye. And when at last he could linger no longer, he took up his hope even as he had laid it down, in the expectation of a luckier day.

"Come again, my dear sir, whenever you can. I am always glad to see you, and your presence cheers Captain Baynell. His father was my dearest friend. I felt his death as if he had been a brother. I have grown greatly attached to his son, who closely resembles him. Anything you can do for Captain Baynell I appreciate as a personal favor. Come again! Come again soon!" [Pg 36]

Perhaps if Colonel Ashley had not been so bereft of the normal interests of life, in this interval of inactivity, his curiosity as to that fleeting glimpse of a beautiful woman might not have maintained its whetted edge. Perhaps constantly recurrent disappointment roused his persistence. He came again and yet again, and still he saw no member of the family save Judge Roscoe. Even the surgeon commented. "There is a considerable feminine garrison up there," he said one day; "I often hear mention of the ladies, but they never make a sally. I suspect the old judge is more of a fire-eater than he shows nowadays, for his womenfolks are evidently straight-out 'Secesh'!"

CHAPTER III [Pg 37]

Captain Baynell himself, throughout his illness, saw naught of the feminine inmates of the house, but the first day of convalescence that he was able to be out of his room and to descend the stairs, unsteadily enough and holding to the balustrade all the way, he was very

civilly greeted by Mrs. Gwynn when he suddenly appeared at the library door.

She glanced up with obvious surprise, then advanced with the light, airy elegance that was naturally appurtenant to her slight figure, and seemed no more a conscious pose or gait than the buoyancy of a bird or a butterfly. She shook hands with him, hoped he was better, congratulated him on the happy termination of so serious an illness, cautioned him against exposure to the chilly uncertain weather, drew a great arm-chair nearer to the fire, and as he seated himself she piled up some old numbers of *Blackwood's Magazine* and the *Edinburgh Review* on a little table close to his elbow.

Her regard for his comfort—casual, even official, so to speak, though it was, the attentive, considerate expression of her beautiful eyes, the kindly tones of her dulcet, drawling voice— [Pg 38] affected him like a benediction. He was still feeble, tremulous, and his heart throbbed with sudden surges of emotion. He was grateful, recognizant, flattered, although the provision for his mental entertainment bore also the interpretation that he need not trouble himself to talk.

Therefore he affected to read, and she sat apparently oblivious of his presence, crocheting a fichu-like garment, called a "sontag" in those days, destined for a friend, evidently, not for her own sombre wear. The material was of an ultramarine blue zephyr, with a border of flecked black and white. She was making no great speed, for often the long, white bone needle fell from her listless grasp, and with her beautiful eyes on the fire, her face no longer a cold, impassive mask, but all unconscious, soft, wistful, sweet, showing her real identity, she would lose herself in revery till some interruption—Judge Roscoe's entrance, the "ladies" and their demands, old Ephraim seeking orders—would rouse her with a start as from a veritable dream.

As the days went thus slowly by it soon came to pass that Baynell could not be silent. Her presence here flattered him, but he did not reflect that the library was the gathering-place of all the family; it held, too, the only fire, except his own, in the house, a fact which he, forgetful of the scarcity of fuel which the army had occasioned, did not appreciate. She could hardly withdraw, and, with her work in her hand, she could not ignore her uncle's [Pg 39] guest.

Sometimes he caught himself covertly studying her expression, marvelling at its complete absorption;—at the strange fact that so slight a token of such deep introspection showed on the surface. It was like some expanse of still, clear waters—one can only know that here are unmeasured fathoms, abysses of unexplored depths. Her meditation, her obvious brooding thought, seemed significant; yet sometimes he was prone to deem this merely the cast of her noble, reflective features, her expansive brow, the comprehensive intelligence of her limpid eyes,—all so beautiful, yet endowed with something far beyond mere beauty. Now and again he read aloud a passage which specially struck his attention, and occasionally her comments jarred on his preconceived opinion of her, or, rather, of what a woman so young, so favored, so graciously endowed, ought to feel and think. One day, particularly, he was much impressed by this. Some benignant philosopher, reaching out both hands to the happy time of the millennium, had given voice to the theory that man's inhumanity to man, particularly in the more cultured circles, was the result of scant mutual knowledge—if we but knew the sorrows of others, how hate would be metamorphosed to pity, the bruised reed unbroken! This sentiment mightily pleased Captain Baynell, and he read it aloud.

It seemed potently to arrest her attention. She laid her work down on her knee and gazed [Pg 40] steadily at him.

"If we could know the secret heartache—the blighted aspiration—the denied longing—the bruised pride of others?"

As he signified assent, she gazed steadily at him for a moment longer in silence. Then—

"If we only knew!" she cried,—"Christian brethren,—what a laughing, jeering, gibing world we should be!"

Once more she took her work in her hands, once more exclaimed, "If we only knew!" and paused to laugh aloud with a low icy tone. Then she inserted the dexterous needle into the fashioning of the "shell" and bent her reflective, smiling face over the swift serpentines of the "zephyr."

Captain Baynell was shocked in some sort. This frank unconscious cynicism was out of keeping with so much grace and charm. He was hardly ready to argue the question. He was dismayed by a sense of futility. If she had thought this, it was enough to show her inmost nature. A substituted, cultivated conviction does not uproot the spontaneous productions of the mind. It is only foisted in their midst. He was silent in his turn, and presently fell to fluttering the leaves of his book and reading with slight interest and only a superficial appearance of absorption.

If we only knew the sorrows of others! Mrs. Gwynn's satiric eyes glowed with the [Pg 41] uncomfortable thought that hers at all events had been public enough. If openness be a claim for sympathy, she might well be entitled to receive balm of all her world. It seared every sensitive fibre within her to realize how much of her intimate inner life they all knew,—her friends, who masked this knowledge with a casual face, but talked over her foolish

miseries among themselves with the mingled gusto of gossip, the superiority of contemptuous commiseration, and a rabid zest of speculation concerning such poor reserves as she had been able to maintain. Much of this drifted back to her knowledge through her old colored nurse, who since her childhood had remained her special attendant, though now officiating as cook to the Roscoe household, and by all respectfully called "Aunt Chaney." Her association with other cooks and ladies' maids enabled her to become well informed as to what was said and known in other households of these affairs. As Aunt Chaney detailed the gossip, she herself would burst into painful tears at the humiliating disclosures, exclaiming ever and anon, "Oh, de debbil was busy, shorely, de day dee married dat man!"

But despite her burden of sympathetic woe, she would gather her powers to compass a debonair assurance toward observant outsiders and optimistically toss her head. "De man was good-looking to *de*straction," she would loftily asseverate, in defence of the situation, [Pg 42] "and he didn't live long, nohow."

Continuing, she would remind her hearers that she had been opposed to her young mistress's marriage, "But shucks! de pore chile saw how the other gals wuz runnin' arter Rufus Allerton Gwynn,—dat Fisher gal tried hard fur true, an' not married yit,—an' dat made Leonora Gwynn—Leonora Roscoe dat wuz—think mo' of his bein' so taken up with her! De hansomes' man in de whole country! He didn't live long!"

This gallant outward show did not prevent the iron from entering the old nurse's soul especially as she detailed the gossip of Miss Fisher's maid, Leanna, who overheard the conversation of her mistress with two particular girl-cronies beside the midnight fire, pending the duty of brushing the long hair of the Fisher enchantress, which, being of a thrice-gilded red tint, required much care and gave her much trouble. It gave trouble elsewhere. Its flaring glories kept others awake besides poor Leanna, plying the brush nightly one "solid hour by the clock." For the fair Miss Mildred Fisher was a famous belle, and many hearts had been entangled in those glittering meshes.

This trio had been Leonora Gwynn's intimate coterie, and she knew just how they looked as they sat half undressed in the chilly midnight before the dying fire in a great bedroom, in the home of one of the three, their tresses—Maude Eldon's dark, and Margaret Duncan's brown, [Pg 43] and Mildred Fisher's red-gold, with Leanna's interested face leaning above their gilded shimmer—hanging down over dressing-sacques or nightgowns, while they actively gesticulated at each other with handglass or brush, and with spirit disputed whether it was a chair which Rufus Gwynn had broken over Leonora's head, or did he merely drag her around by the hair—"Think of that, my dear,—by her hair!"

It was a poor consolation, but this neither they, nor any other, would ever know. With the reflection Leonora set her even little teeth together as she still dreamily gazed into the fire.

Other more obvious facts she could not conceal. Her stringent, hopeless poverty would bring a piteous expression to Judge Roscoe's face as occasion required him to seek to gather together some humble remnants of the estate her husband had recklessly flung away, for he had dissipated her fortune as well as desolated her heart. She needed no reminder, and indeed no word passed Judge Roscoe's lips of the settlements that he had drawn when he discovered that, despite all remonstrances, his orphaned niece was bent upon this marriage. Though Rufus Gwynn protested that he would sign them, she had tossed them into the fire like a heroine of romance, grandiloquently declaring that she would not trust herself to a man to whom she could not trust her fortune.

How pleased her lover had been! How gay, gallant, triumphant! Later he found his account [Pg 44] in her folly and a more substantial value than flattered pride, for by reason of her marriage the financial control of her guardian was abrogated, and her thousands slipped through her husband's fingers like sand at the gaming-table, the wine-rooms, the race-track, as with his wild, riotous companions he went his swift way to destruction and death. And even this did not alienate her, for her early admiration and foolish adoration had a continuance that a devotion for a worthier object rarely attains, and she loved him long, despite financial reverses and wicked waste and cruelty and neglect. She could have forgiven him aught, all, but his own unworthiness. Who can gauge the sophistries, the extenuations, the hopes, that delude a woman who clings to an ideal of her own tender fashioning, the dream of a fond heart, and the sacrifice of a loving young life. He left her not one vain imagining that she might still hold dear amidst the wreck of her existence.

The crisis came at the end of a quarrel,—one of his own making,—a quarrel about a horse that he wished to sell;—oh, the trifle—the trifle that had wrought such woe!

As she thought of it anew, sitting before the fire, she laid the work upon her knee and unconsciously wrung her hands. The next moment she felt the eyes of the officer lifted toward her in a cursory glance. She affected to shift the rings on her fingers, then took up [Pg 45] the crochet-needle and bent her head to the deft fashioning of shells.

Now she could think unmolested, think of what she could never forget! Yet why should she canvass the details again and again, save that she must. The event marked an epoch of final significance in her life,—the moment that her dream fled and she awakened to the stern fact that she had ceased to love. And at first it was a trifle, a mere trifle, that had inaugurated this amazing change. Her husband wished to sell the horse, her horse, that Judge Roscoe

had given her a week before. The gift had come, she knew, as an overture of reconciliation, as there had been much hard feeling between Judge Roscoe and his niece. For after her elopement and marriage he promptly applied to the chancery court seeking to protect her future by securing the settlement on her of certain funds of her estate, urging the fact of her minority and the spendthrift character of her husband. Leonora vehemently opposed the petition, and owing to the efforts of her counsel to gain time and the law's delays, she came of age before any decree could be granted, and then defeated the measure by making a full legal waiver of her rights in favor of her husband. But, at length, when pity overmastered Judge Roscoe's just anger, she welcomed a token of his renewed cordiality. She did not feel at liberty to sell the gift, she had remonstrated. It was not bestowed as a resource—to sell. [Pg 46] She feared to wound her kinsman. What was the pressing necessity for money? Why not manage as if the horse had not been given her?

The contention waxed high as she stood in habit and hat just in the vestibule with the horse outside hitched to the block, for Judge Roscoe was coming to ride with her. She held fast, for a wonder; she seldom could resist; but the horse was not theirs *to sell*. Rufus Gwynn suddenly turned at last, sprang up the stairs, three steps at a time, and as he came bounding down again she saw the glint of steel in his hand.

Even now she shuddered.

"It is growing colder," Captain Baynell said. (How observant that man seemed to be!) "Allow me to mend the fire."

He stirred the hickory logs, and as the yellow flames shot up the chimney he sank back into his great chair, and she took up the thread of her work and her reminiscences together.

She honestly thought her husband had intended to kill her. Somehow the veil dropped from her eyes, and she knew him for the fiend he was even before the dastardly act that revealed him unqualified.

But it was not she on whom his spite was to fall. Such deeds bring retribution. Only the horse—the glossy, graceful, spirited animal, turning his lustrous confiding eyes toward the house as the door opened, whinnying a low joyous welcome, anticipative of the breezy gallop [Pg 47] —received the bullet just below the ear.

It was then and afterward like the distraught agony of a confused dream. She heard her own screams as if they had been uttered by another; she saw the great bulk of the horse lying in the road, struggling frightfully, futilely, whether with conscious pain or merely the last reserves of muscular energy she did not know; she noted the gathering crowd, dismayed, bewildered, angry; she knew that her husband had hastily galloped off, a trifle out of countenance because of certain threats of some brawny Irish railroad hands going home with their dinner-pails who had seen the whole occurrence. Then Judge Roscoe had ridden up at last to accompany her as of old, thinking how pretty and pleased she would be on the new horse,—for equestrianism was the vaunt of the girls of that day and she had been a famous horsewoman,—and feeling a great pity because of her privations, and her cruel folly, and her unworthy husband. When he saw what had just occurred, he said instantly, "You must come home with me, Leonora; you are not safe." And she had answered, "Take me with you—quick—quick! So that I may never see that coward again." Thus she had left her husband forever.

"Shall I draw up the blind?" asked Captain Baynell, seeing her fumble for her zephyr.

"No, thank you; there is still light sufficient, I think. The days are growing longer." [Pg 48]

Again, in the silence of the quiet room, the spell of her reminiscences resumed its sway. She recalled the promises that had not sufficed; no explanations extenuated the facts; no lures could avail; her resolution was taken and held firm. She laughed when, with full confidence in her unshaken love for him, her husband appealed to her by their mutual devotion. She was simply enlightened. But she resented the satisfaction that Judge Roscoe and his wife obviously felt in the separation, and the knowledge of the secret triumph of all her friends who had opposed the match. She was embittered, humiliated, broken-spirited, yet she maintained throughout a mask of placidity to the world, inquisitive, pitying, ridiculing, as she knew it to be. The separation passed as temporary. She was making a visit to her former home. This feint had the more countenance when a sudden need for her presence arose. Her aunt fell ill and died, and soon there came tidings of the death of Clarence Roscoe's wife while he was far away in the Confederate army. The three little girls were all alone.

"Bring them here, Uncle Gerald. I will take charge of them," Leonora had said. "Perhaps I can feel less dependent then."

And Judge Roscoe, who had borne his own losses like a philosopher, had tears in his eyes for [Pg 49] her losses. "Oh, poor Leonora!" he had exclaimed. "Your very presence is a boon, my dear. But for *you* to be so stricken and desolate and—"

He was about to say "robbed," but the facts forbade him; for Gwynn's legal rights rendered her position as difficult as unenviable. In her own house she had contrived to hold her belongings together. Now, day by day, came tidings of the sale of her special personal effects—her carriage, her domestic animals, her furniture, the very pictures on the walls;

then had followed a letter from her husband, regretting all his misdeeds and promising infinite rehabilitation if she would but forgive him. Naught could provoke a remonstrance, could stimulate Leonora to action, could induce a return.

Judge Roscoe had said but little. He had the deep-seated juridical respect for the relation of man and wife as a creation of law, as well as an institution of God. When he was appealed to, he felt it his duty to place impartially before her the husband's arguments, and promises, and protestations, but he experienced intense relief when she tersely dismissed Rufus Gwynn's plea for a reconciliation. "I know him now," she replied.

"An' 'fore de Lawd, *I* knows him too!" her old nurse declared; "I jes' uped an' I sez, 'Marse Rufe, ye hev' got sech a notion o' sellin' out, ye mought sell old Chaney—ef ennybody would buy sech a contraption in dese days! So I'm goin' over to my old home at Judge Roscoe's [Pg 50] place, to wait on Miss Leonora. I knows she needs me, an' I 'spect she's watchin' fur me now.' An' Marse Rufe, he says, 'Aunt Chaney, I don't know *what* you are talking about! Go over there, an' welcome! An' try to get my wife to see I was just overtaken in my temper and desperate; *you* persuade her to come back, Aunt Chaney.' Dat's what de debbil said ter me. I always heard dat de debbil had a club foot. But, mon, he ain't. Two long, slim, handsome feet, an' his boots, sah, made in New Orleens!"

The end had come characteristically at last! A horse, furiously ridden, brutally beaten, reared suddenly, lost his balance, fell backward, crushing the rider and breaking his neck. And so Rufus Gwynn reached his goal, and his wife was free at last.

Free as some defenceless, hunted, tremulous animal, miraculously escaping fierce fangs, and a furious rush of a murderous pursuit; forever dominated by the sense of disaster, and despair, and flight; forever looking backward, forever hearkening to the echoes of the troublous past—exhausted, listless, hopeless, every impulse of volition stunned.

It was well for her, doubtless, that the insistent duties of the care of her uncle's household had grown difficult in the changed conditions induced by the war; that the education, the training, the well-being, of the motherless little "ladies"—all restricted by the ever narrowing opportunity of the beleaguered town, and overshadowed by the impending clouds [Pg 51] of disaster—appealed to her womanly heart and her maternal instincts. Their needs had roused her interest, stimulated her invention, elicited her self-control, that she might more definitely control them.

In the days of Captain Baynell's convalescence he had unique opportunities for observing the methods that had prevailed under her management, for all the life of the house revolved about the one big fire in the library. Sometimes, as he and Judge Roscoe sat there with papers and books and cigars, presumably oblivious of the minutiæ of the household matters, while the fire flared and the tobacco smoke hung in blue wreaths about the stuccoed ceiling and the carved ornaments of the tall book-cases, he fancied that it was the characteristic interest in trifles animating an invalid which caused him to smilingly watch the scholastic struggles of the "ladies,"—their turmoils with "jogaphy," for it was decreed that they should learn somewhat of the earth on which they lived; the anguish inflicted by that potent instrument of torture, the Blue Speller; the bowed head of juvenile despair on the wooden rim of the slate, over the mysteries of "subscraction," as the "lady" sobbed softly, under her breath, for loud weepings were interdicted, however poignant the woe might be. Mrs. Gwynn was indeed unfeeling in these crises and often sarcastic. "You might use your sponge to wipe away your tears, Geraldine," she would say, with that curt icy inflection of her soft [Pg 52] voice. "I notice it is too dry for use on your slate."

Each slate had a string to which was attached a small sponge and a short slate-pencil, capable of an excruciating creak, which often set the judge's teeth on edge; as he would wince from the sound, Mrs. Gwynn would comment in this wise, "I have often heard that learned ladies do not contribute to household comfort,—so your Honor must suffer for the erudition that we have here."

And the activities of "subscraction" were never abated.

Baynell had at first a certain shrinking to witness the lessons of the deaf-mute, pitying the poor deprived child, so young, so tender, so pretty, so plaintive in her infirmity, shut out from all the usual avenues of knowledge. He would take up his book and withdraw his attention. But after a time there was suddenly forced upon his observation the superior judgment and acumen and careful altruistic thought exerted in these small matters by Mrs. Gwynn. Inexpert in the manual alphabet, she wasted no time nor labor on its acquisition for herself; but, notwithstanding this, "subscraction" had no terrors for Lucille. So practised was she in the domain of demonstration that her slate was swiftly covered with figures, and her sponge had no necessity to be diverted to the incongruous function of wiping her bright [Pg 53] eyes. All the questions were put in writing and answered by the little deaf-mute with correct spelling and a most legible and creditable chirography, over which Captain Baynell found himself exclaiming with delighted surprise, while the cheeks both of the scholar and teacher flushed with pride and gratification, as they exchanged congratulatory smiles. So far from being the sport of her limitations and humiliated by them, Lucille was pressed forward to excel, and the twins gazed upon her as a miracle of learning, and often craved the privilege of scanning her slate, and imitating the childish flourishes of her capital letters. In naught was she permitted to feel her deficiencies—so craftily tender was her preceptress. The hour

which the twins devoted to playing scales on the grand piano—being snugly buttoned up in sacques to protect them from the chill of the great parlors, and often called across the hall to warm their fingers at the library fire—Lucille sat at her drawing-board, and although she had only an ordinary degree of talent, she acquired a deftness and a proficiency that made the result remarkable for a child of her age; her leisure was encouraged to express itself in sketching from nature, and she went about much of the time pleasantly engrossed, holding up a pencil at a stiff angle and at arm's-length to take accurate measurement of relative distances and details of perspective.

Baynell was a man who could be allured by a pretty face, but he could never have fallen in [Pg 54] love with a woman merely for her beauty. He was possessed of insistent ideals, and now and then these were shattered by an evidence of Mrs. Gwynn's incongruously bitter cynicism, or a touch of repellent hardness and an icy coldness unpleasing in one so young, and all his preconceived prejudices were to adjust anew. He was beginning at last to feel that he must seek to realize her nature, rather than to fit her into the niche awaiting the conventional goddess of his fancy. She had other traits as inconsistent with her youth, her grace, her beauty, her lissome gait, her delicate hand; and these were homespun virtues, so plain, so good, so useful, so aggressive—such as one may fancy are designed to compensate the possessor for limitations in a more graceful sort,—according with an angular frame, a near-sighted vision, a rasping voice. There was scant need to look so beautiful, so daintily speculative, as she sat and cast up the judge's household accounts in a big red book that seemed full of cobweb perplexities and strenuous calculations to make both ends meet. Sometimes she brought it over to her uncle and, placing it before his reluctant gaze, pointed out some item of his own extravagance with a dignity of rebuke and a look of superior wisdom that might have realized to the imagination Minerva herself. Such a wealth of good house-keeping lore, so accurately applied, might have justified any amount of feminine [Pg 55] ugliness.

Her tender, far-sighted, commiserative appreciation of the deaf-mute's limitations, and the simple measures that had so far nullified them and utilized all the child's capacity, were incongruous with the iron rule under which the three were held.

"I am afraid the ladies are giving you a great deal of trouble, Leonora," her uncle said one day, apologetically, when absolute mutiny seemed abroad amongst them.

"Not half so much trouble as I intend to give them," Mrs. Gwynn replied resolutely.

Their meek, mild, readjusted little faces after the scholastic hours were over were enough to move a heart of stone, and now and again Judge Roscoe glanced uneasily at them, and at last said inappropriately enough:—

"I am afraid you have not had a happy morning, ladies."

"They have been brought to hear reason," Mrs. Gwynn observed dryly. "And I have heard reason, too,—the Fourth Line of the Multiplication Table recited backward four times, standing facing the wall. It is an exercise that tends to subdue the angry passions. Allow me to commend it for general experiment."

Baynell sought to laugh the episode off genially with the "ladies," but the three little faces looked for permission to ridicule this dire experience, and as Mrs. Gwynn's countenance maintained a blank inscrutability, they did not venture to make merry over their miseries of [Pg 56] the "Four Line," now happily overpast.

The scholastic duties were well over by noon, except perhaps for the scale-playing on the grand piano, and the "ladies" roamed at will about the house, or in the parterre if the weather were dry, or played at battledore and shuttlecock or graces in the long gallery enclosed with Venetian blinds. If it rained they were permitted to repair to the kitchen, where Aunt Chaney, a very tall, portly woman, with a stately gruffness, obviously spurious, accommodated them with bits of dough, to be moulded into ducks and pigs, and assigned them a small section of the stove whereon to bake these triumphs of the plastic art. Doll's dresses were here laundered, being washed in a small cedar noggin owned in common by the trio, and a miniature sad-iron, heated by special permission on Aunt Chaney's stove, was brought into requisition. Sometimes Aunt Chaney was in a softened mood, and fluted a ruffle on a wax baby's skirt, and told wonderful tales about Mrs. Gwynn's dresses in her girlhood, "flounced to the waist, and crimped to a charm." Thence the transition was easy to the details of her young mistress's social triumphs and celebrated beauty, with lovers in gangs, all sighing like furnaces and represented as rolling in riches and riding splendid and prancing horses, the final special zest of each story being the fruitless jealousy of the red- [Pg 57] headed Miss Mildred Fisher, eating her heart out,—this to the immature imagination of the "ladies" literally resembled the chickens' hearts which were so daintily chopped to garnish the dish of fried pullets amidst the parsley.

As the rain beat against the windows and the evening fell, the trio thought many a loitering-place less attractive than the chimney-nook behind the stove in Aunt Chaney's kitchen, regaled with her stories as she cooked, and now and then a spoonful of some dainty, administered with the curt command, "Open yer mouf, ladies!"

Thus it was that the library was almost deserted when Colonel Ashley called more than once. Captain Baynell he found, and occasionally the judge also. He always selected the

afternoons, and after a time he was wont to glance about with such a keen, predatory expression that the truth began to dawn vaguely on Captain Baynell. Vanity is so robust an endowment that it had been easy enough for the recipient of these visits to appropriate wholly the interest that prompted them. It struck Baynell with an indignant sense of impropriety when he began to remember Ashley's ardent desire to meet Mrs. Gwynn, his admiration of the glimpse of her beauty that had once been vouchsafed him, and to connect this with his manifestation of good comradeship and eager solicitude concerning his friend's health. Baynell was infinitely out of countenance for a moment. [Pg 58]

"Why, confound the fellow! He doesn't care a fig whether I live or die." Then he was sensible of a rising anger, that he should be made the subterfuge of a systematic endeavor to casually meet Mrs. Gwynn,—likely to prove successful in the last instance. For lowering clouds overspread the sky when Ashley entered late in the afternoon, and a storm so violent, so tumultuous, broke with such sudden fury that it was impossible for him to take leave had he desired this. Baynell knew that nothing was further from his comrade's wish. Ashley reconciled himself so swiftly to Judge Roscoe's insistence that he should remain to tea that it might seem he had come for that express purpose.

"Dat man," soliloquized the "double-faced Janus" impressively, "mus' hev' smelled de perfume of dat ar flummery plumb ter de camp. Chaney wuz jes' dishin' up when he ring de door-bell!"

CHAPTER IV [Pg 59]

Now, face to face with the long-sought opportunity, Colonel Ashley was grievously disappointed. A woman—young, singularly beautiful, dressed like a middle-aged frump, with the manners of a matron of fifty, staid, reserved, inattentive, uninterested!

The incongruity affected him like a discourtesy; its rarity had no attractions for him, nor in the slightest degree roused his curiosity. He had expected charm, glow, responsiveness, coquetry,—all the various traits that attend on beauty and youth. Even a conscious hauteur would have had its special grace and piqued an effort to win her to cordiality, but here was the inexpressiveness, the indifference, of an elderly woman, one tired, despondent, done with the world—civil, indeed, as behooved her rearing, her station, but unnoting—really apart from all the interests of the present and all thought for the future. And, certainly, Mrs. Gwynn's life might be considered already lived out in her past.

The rain fell in sheets, and Colonel Ashley wished himself back in camp, despite the flavor of the flummery. As they sat at table, now and again a vivid glare of lightning revealed through [Pg 60] the windows the expanse of falling water, closely wrought as a silver-gray fabric, and the flash of white foam from its impact with the ground. The house seemed to rock with the reverberations of the bursts of thunder.

When they were once more in the library, Colonel Ashley found himself with a long evening on his hands; his chum, Baynell, had fallen into one of his frequent fits of silent reflectiveness as he smoked, and Judge Roscoe, an ascetic, quiet, uncongenial old man, of opposite political convictions,—which placed an embargo on all the topics of the day,—did not seem to promise much in the way of lively companionship.

Mrs. Gwynn still lingered in the dining room, and the little "ladies" explained that her old nurse, who was now the cook, was afflicted with a "misery," seeming to bear some relation to neuralgia, and needed help to get through with her work, "Uncle Ephraim being a poor dependence" where the handling of crockery was concerned.

The "ladies," with true feminine coquetry, affected a shy reserve, and rather retreated from the expansive jovial bonhomie of Colonel Ashley's hearty advances toward them, albeit they were wont to press their attentions upon the inexpressive Captain Baynell. They met with fluttering downcast glances the engaging twinkle of Ashley's bright dark eyes. They replied with demure little clipped monosyllables to his gay sallies, and indeed Colonel Ashley bade [Pg 61] fair to discharge the task of entertaining himself throughout the evening, till he luckily asked one of them what she liked best to play—graces or battledore and shuttlecock, Geraldine having brought in a grace-hoop and now holding it in her hands before her as she stood in the flicker of the fire.

"I like cards best," Adelaide volunteered unexpectedly.

"Have you a pack of cards? Then let's have a game!" Ashley cried gayly; "though I'm afraid you can beat me at anything I try."

There was a shrill jubilance of juvenile acclaim. The three, their ringlets waving, their cheeks flushing, the short skirts of their gay attire—blue, and crimson, and orange—fluttering joyfully, were instantly placing the chairs about the little card-table and climbing

into them, while Colonel Ashley took the cards and dealt them with many airy fancy touches, to the amazement and admiration of the "ladies." With his versatile capacity for all sorts of enjoyment, the incident was beginning to have a certain zest for him, involving no sacrifice either of inclination or time. Baynell realized how Ashley also valued the pose. He had an intuitive perception of Ashley's own relish of its incongruity,—the gallant colonel of cavalry, who had successfully measured blades with the fiercest swordsmen and masters of fence, to be now lending himself gently to play with three little children, whose soft eyes glowed upon [Pg 62] him with radiant admiration and tenderest confidence, while the firelight flared and flickered within and the storm raged without! Baynell knew that it was with an appreciated sacrifice of the perfect proportions of the situation that Ashley finally dealt cards for his friend and Judge Roscoe; he would have preferred to exclude them, if he might, and have the whole stage for the effects of his own dramatic personality. But never, in all his weavings of romance about himself, was Ashley guilty of even the slightest injustice or discourtesy or forgetfulness of the claims of others; hence his character was almost as fine and lovable as he feigned, or as it would have seemed, had but his foible of self-appreciation, self-gratulation, borne a juster proportion and been rendered less obvious by his own cheerful, unconscious, transparent candor. There was no guile in him, and the smile was quite genuine with which he took up his cards and affected to look anxiously through them to discern if Fate lurked therein in the presence of the Old Maid.

For it was this dread game that the "ladies" had chosen, and a serious affair it is when regarded from their standpoint. Ashley had now no need of his own sentiments or mental processes or artistic poses to minister to his entertainment. It was quite sufficient to watch the faces of the "ladies" as the "draw" went round, each player in turn taking at random an unseen card from the hand of the next neighbor to the left, the whole pack of course having [Pg 63] been dealt. The heavy terror of doom was attendant upon the unwelcome pasteboard. Once, as this harbinger of Fate passed on, a gleeful squeal announced that a "lady" had escaped the anguish of the prospect of single blessedness.

"That's not fair, Ger'ldine!" exclaimed Adelaide, reprovingly; "you have told ever'body that Gran'pa has drawed the Old Maid!"

"I jus' couldn't help it—I was *so glad* she was gone," apologized the contrite Geraldine.

"It makes no difference, my precious, for I have two of the queens, and they are a pair," said Judge Roscoe, and as he threw the mates on the table the "ladies" placed their hands on their lips to stifle the aghast "Ohs!" and "Ahs!" that trembled on utterance, and gazed on their fellow-gamesters with great, excited, round eyes. For the crisis had supervened. Of course one of the queens had been withdrawn from the pack at the commencement of the game, in order to leave an odd queen as the Old Maid. Since two had just been discarded there remained the prophetic spinster, and each "lady's" delicate little fingers trembled on the "draw." Ashley could scarcely preserve a becoming gravity and inexpressiveness as the pleading beseeching eyes of his next neighbor were cast up to his countenance, seeking to read there some intimation of the character of the card she had selected. More than once the choice was precipitately abandoned at the last moment and another card snatched at [Pg 64] hysteric haphazard. Then when an insignificant five of diamonds or three of spades was revealed,—what joy of relief, what deep-drawn sighs of relaxed tension, what activity of little slippered feet under the table, unable to be still, fairly dancing with pleasure that the Old Maid with her awful augury still held aloof and went the rounds elsewhere! Then—the eagerness of expectation and the renewed jeopardy of doubt.

"On my word, this is sport!" exclaimed Colonel Ashley. "This is better than a 'small stake to give an interest to the game,'—eh, Judge?"

"It's a *big* stake," said Geraldine, at his elbow, "the Old Maid is!"

The desperate suspense, the anguish of jeopardy, continued, and at length Geraldine had but one card left, Colonel Ashley holding two; the other players having matched and tabled the rest of the pack were now out of the game. Seeing how seriously the doom of spinsterhood was regarded, Colonel Ashley sought to prevent his little neighbor from drawing the fateful pasteboard by craftily shifting the cards in his hand as she was about to take hold of the grim-visaged queen. Geraldine detected the motion instantly, with deep suspicion misinterpreted his intention, and laid hold on the card he had manœuvred to retain. Her crestfallen dismay betrayed the disaster. With wide, fearfully prescient eyes she [Pg 65] nevertheless gathered all her faculties for the final effort. Cautiously holding her two cards under the table, she shifted them, interchanged them back and forth, then tremulously permitted him to draw. This done, he placidly placed two fives on the table.

There was a moment of impressive silence while the "lady" held before her eyes in her babyish fingers the single card, and gazed petrified on the Medusa-like visage of the Old Maid. Then, as a murmur of awe arose from the other "ladies," looking pityingly upon her, yet blissful in their own escape, she burst into tears, and, bowing her golden head in her arms on the table, wept copiously, though softly, silently, mindful that Cousin Leonora allowed no "loud whooping in weeps," her little shoulders shaken by her sobs.

Colonel Ashley could but laugh as he protested, "This is truly flattering to masculine vanity." Then, his kindly impulses uppermost, "Come, Miss Geraldine, let's have another round. There must be more Old Maids still hiding out in this crowd. Let's see who they are."

Adelaide looked alarmed as the stricken one lifted her head to the prospect of the company that misery loves.

"I wish I was like Cousin Leonora, born a widow-woman," she remarked, regarding the doubtful future askance.

"Widow-womans can marry,—Aunt Chaney says they can," Geraldine declared, as she took up the cards of the new deal. [Pg 66]

"Well, you would speak more properer if you said 'widow-*womens*' than 'widow-*womans*,'" rejoined the critical Adelaide, rendered tart by her renewed jeopardy and the sudden termination of the definite sense of escape.

While each player's hand was full of cards, the three queens still amongst them, the interest was not so tense as the first few draws went round and Mrs. Gwynn's entrance from the dining room created some stir.

Baynell and Ashley rose to offer her a chair, and the latter proposed to deal her a hand in the game.

"Not this round," she returned, "as the game has already commenced. Besides, I am quite chilly. I shall sit by the fire and read the evening paper until you play out the hand."

She seated herself near the fire, shivered once or twice, and held out her dainty fingers to it with exactly the utilitarian manner of some elderly woman, whose house-keeping errands have detained her in the cold, and who extends gnarled, misshapen, chapped, wrinkled hands, soliciting comfort from the warmth. Then she took up the paper and held the sheet to catch the lamplight from the centre-table upon it.

"Why doesn't she put on her 'specs'? She knows she needs them," Colonel Ashley said to himself in a sort of whimsical exasperation. Her figure was slim and girlish, sylphlike as she [Pg 67] reclined in the large fauteuil; her hair glittered golden in the flicker of the fire and the sheen of the lamp; her face, with its serious expression intent on the closely printed columns, might almost seem a sculptor's study of perfect facial symmetry. Her incongruous indifference, her elderly assumptions,—if, indeed, she was conscious of the effect of her manner,—all betokened that she considered it no part of her duty, and certainly no point of interest, to entertain young men.

"We are mere boys to her, Baynell and I; she'll never see her sixtieth birthday again. I have known younger grandmothers," was Colonel Ashley's farcical thought.

Her nullity of attitude toward him was so complete that she limited the possibilities of his imagination. He began to devote himself to the gentle pursuit in hand with a freshened ardor.

Around and around the draw went, almost in absolute silence. Now and again the tabling of matching cards sounded with the sharp impact of triumph, but this was growing infrequent as the hands were thus depleted. The firelight flickered on the incongruous group,—the bearded faces of the military men, the gold-laced uniforms, with buttons glimmering like points of light, the infantine softness of the "ladies," with their fluttering ringlets and gala attire, the gray head and ascetic aspect of the judge. The heat had enhanced the odor of a [Pg 68] bowl of violets on the table in the centre of the room; as the flames rose and fell, the lion on the rug seemed to stir about, to rouse from his lair.

Outside the rain still fell in torrents; the tumult of the gush from the gutter hard by gave intimations of great volume of overflow. At long intervals a drop fell hissing down the chimney on the coals where the fire had burned to a white heat. The wind sang like a trump, and from far away the reverberations of a train of cars came with a sort of muffled sonority that was almost indistinguishable from the vibrations of the earth. One hardly knew whether the approach of the train was felt or heard.

"I can't see how a locomotive can keep the rails in such a night as this," Colonel Ashley remarked, lifting his head to listen. "I had rather my command would be playing the duck down there in the puddles than crossing that half-submerged bridge on that troop train."

"Are they transporting troops now?" asked Judge Roscoe, casually. He was a lawyer and knew the general inappropriateness and inadmissibility of a leading question. He had, however, no interest in the response, for the transit of troops did not necessarily intimate reënforcements to the garrison, and hence the expectation of attack, but perhaps merely the intention of distant activity.

Captain Baynell lifted his eyes from his cards, and a glance of warning, of upbraiding, [Pg 69] flashed into the jovial dark eyes of Colonel Ashley. Judge Roscoe perceived it with surprise and a sort of uncomfortable monition that he and his guest, the son of his cherished friend, were in reality in opposition in a most important crisis of the life of each—in effect, national enemies. He had not thus regarded their standpoint, and the idea that this was Baynell's conviction wounded him. He hardly thought the warning glance in his own house either necessary or in good form, and he was not ill pleased to subtly perceive that Ashley secretly resented it.

"A troop train, I should judge, by the sound," Ashley said hardily, his head still poised in a listening pose. "Evidently heavily laden; might be horses, though," he continued speculatively. He would not submit to be checked or disciplined into prudential considerations by Baynell, especially as Judge Roscoe must have noted the warning sign, which itself would tend to convert a simple casual remark into a significant disclosure. He said to himself that he knew the proper limitations of conversation, and was the last man in the world to let slip a hint that might by any means inform or even prompt the enemy. Moreover, Judge Roscoe was not deaf, and could distinguish the deep rumble of cars laden with troops from the usual sound of the running-gear of a train of ordinary freight and passengers. He went on casually and with an expansive effect of frankness: "Horses, most [Pg 70] probably; there is a cavalry regiment in town that has been at the front as dismounted troops, and I think an order is out for horses for their use as cavalry again; they have been pressing horses all over the county yesterday and the day before. Winstead's troopers, you know," he added, addressing Baynell. "I saw him to-day. He says his men all seem pigeon-toed, or web-footed, or something. They were of no use afoot, although they have done very well in the saddle."

"An'—an' did they wear boots on birds' feet an' web-toes?" asked the amazed Geraldine, innocently.

"Oh—oh, *Ger'ldine*!" screamed the superior Adelaide. "He means walkin' this-a-way," and her hands went across the table in a "toeing-in" gait, illustrative of the defect known as "pigeon toes."

"Aw—aw—*I* know now!" said the instructed "lady," wofully out of countenance. Then she turned to draw from her neighbor's hand with much doubt and circumspection, for the matched pile in the centre was now large and the remaining cards had become few.

At that moment Mrs. Gwynn glanced up from the paper; she had been reading an account of a recent spirited skirmish at the front.

"What is the difference between shrapnel and grape-shot?" she asked of the company at large.

Baynell, the artillery expert, rejoiced to enlighten her. He turned in his chair and promptly [Pg 71] took the word from the others. Few experts can answer any simple question categorically. Not only did he explain the missiles in question, but also how they had happened to be what they were, and the earlier stages of their development. He gave his views on their relative value and the possibility of their future utility,—all while Ashley, who now sat next him, as they had chanced to shift their chairs when Mrs. Gwynn had entered, waited with quiet and polite patience for him to draw. Baynell did this at haphazard at last, and whether it was accident or Fate that the significant card was practically thrust into his heedless hand by the mischievous Ashley, his countenance fell at beholding the prognosis of single blessedness, so palpably, so preposterously, that the jovial Ashley could not restrain his bantering laughter. Baynell instantly presented the cards to him to draw in turn, but either favored by luck or having acquired some surreptitious unfair knowledge of the outer aspect of the card, Ashley avoided the ill-omened pasteboard, and Baynell was at last left with the single card in his hand, while his triumphant friend made the room riotous with laughter, and the three "ladies" bent compassionate, tender eyes upon him, as if they anticipated the conventional gush of tears. They had grown very fond of him, and deeply felt the disaster that had befallen him.

"Oh, Captain Baynell, never mind! never mind!" cried the inspirational Adelaide. "*We'll* [Pg 72] marry you! *We'll* marry you! You needn't be *so* anxious!"

Once more Ashley's ringing merriment amazed the sympathetic "ladies."

Lucille cast a burning glance of reproof upon him. Then she held up three fingers to Captain Baynell to intimate that three brides awaited him.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Ashley. "Here's a settler for Utah, Judge. That's evidently the place for this fellow 'when this cruel war is over'!"

Judge Roscoe smilingly watched the benignant, commiserating little countenances.

Adelaide had gone around the table and was hanging on the arm of Captain Baynell's chair as she proffered consolation.

"Colonel Ashley wouldn't think it so mighty funny if *he* had the Old Maid! But *don't* mind, Captain. Why, *I* know *Cousin Leonora* would marry you, if nobody else would,—she always does anything when nobody else wants to."

The silver tones were singularly clear, and for a moment the group sat in appalled silence. Ashley did not laugh, though his face was still distended with the risible muscles. It was like a laughing mask—the form without the fact. He did not dare even to glance toward the chair where Mrs. Gwynn imperturbably perused the war news, nor yet at the stony terror which he felt was petrified on his friend's face. At that moment a vivid white light quivered horribly [Pg 73] through the room and the repetitious crashing clamor of the thunder was like a cannonade at close quarters. A great fibrous sound of the riving of timber told that a tree hard by had been split by the bolt; the torrents descended with redoubled force, and the massive old

house seemed to rock.

And in the moment of comparative quiet a new, strange sound intruded itself on recognition,—that most uncanny voice, the cry of a horse in the extremity of terror. It came again and again; at each successive peal of the thunder and recurrent furious flare of lightning it seemed nearer. It had a subterranean effect; and then after the crash of falling objects, as if some barrier had been overthrown, the iteration of unmistakable hoof beats on stone flagging announced that there was a horse in the cellar.

This phenomenon obviously indicated an effort to save the animal from the impress of horses for army service, which had been in progress for days and to which Colonel Ashley had alluded. Far away in the wine-cellar, in the safe precincts under the back drawing-room, which was rarely used nowadays, the horse had evidently been ensconced, and but for the storm his presence might have continued indefinitely undetected. The tremendous conflict of the powers of the air, the unfamiliar place, the loneliness, had stricken the creature with [Pg 74] panic fright, and, doubtless hearing human voices in the library, he had overthrown temporary obstacles, burst down inadequate doors, and following the genial sound was now stamping and whinnying just beneath the floor. Colonel Ashley, affecting to note nothing unusual, dealt the cards anew, and commented on the fury of the tempest.

"I fancy you have lost one of your fine ancestral oaks, Judge. That bolt struck timber with a vengeance."

"We have the consolation of a prospect of firewood," responded Judge Roscoe. "But I doubt if it struck only one of the trees."

"I think I never before saw such a flash as that," remarked Ashley.

The horse in the cellar protested that *he* never had. Then he fairly yelped at a comparatively mild suffusion followed by a dull roar of thunder, evidently anticipating a renewal of the pyrotechnic horrors that had so terrified him.

Judge Roscoe maintained an imperturbable aspect, despite a certain mortification and a sense of derogation of dignity. He recognized this as a scheme of old Ephraim's. More than once he had so contrived the disappearance of the last milch cow that his master possessed as to save her from the foraging parties bent on beef. Chickens had experiences of invisibility that were not fatal, and though the carriage pair and the judge's saddle-horse had been the victims of surprise,—impressed long ago,—the old servant had again and again [Pg 75] rescued a beautiful animal that Mrs. Gwynn owned and which had been a second gift from Judge Roscoe. Hearing betimes of the press orders from the soldiers, the "double-faced Janus" had besought Judge Roscoe to leave the concealment of Acrobat to him; and, although only a passive factor in the enterprise, Judge Roscoe, as much surprised at the denouement as any one else, was forced to bear the brunt of the lamentable fiasco in which the secret had become public.

Baynell, though silent, looked extremely annoyed.

"This rainfall will raise the river considerably," Ashley commented.

"Shouldn't be surprised if the lower portions of the town are flooded already," said Judge Roscoe, throwing out a pair of matched cards.

"Those precincts are very ill situated," said Ashley.

The Houyhnhnm in the cellar protested that he was, too.

"High water must occasion considerable suffering among the poorer class," rejoined the judge.

"But the locality could have been easily avoided in laying out Roanoke City. Draw, Captain —" Ashley broke off suddenly, being forced to remind the preoccupied Baynell of his turn to supply his hand.

"The commercial convenience of wharfage at low stages of water was doubtless the [Pg 76] inducement," explained Judge Roscoe.

"To be sure,—minimizes the distance for loading freights," assented Ashley.

"Yes, the drays come to the very decks of the boats."

"*That* was a pretty sharp flash," said Ashley.

"Oh, it was—it was!" whooped the Houyhnhnm from out the cellar. He evidently executed a sort of intricate passado, to judge from the sound of his hysteric hoofs on the stone flagging.

"I hope your fine grove will sustain no more casualties," said Ashley.

"I hope, myself, the house won't be struck," whimpered the speculative Adelaide.

"Me, too! Me, too!" cried the horse.

"Draw, Captain,"—once more Ashley had occasion to rouse the absorbed Baynell.

At every inapposite, disaffected remark that the horse in the cellar saw fit to interject into the conversation, the twins, evidently well aware of the betrayal of the domestic secret by his loud-voiced intrusion into the apartment beneath the library, fully apprehending the disaster, at first looked aghast at each other, then referred it to the adjustment of superior wisdom by a long, earnest gaze at their grandfather.

Judge Roscoe could ill sustain the expectation of their childish comment. But he felt that his dignity was involved in ignoring that aught was amiss. His composure emulated Ashley's [Pg 77] resolute placidity and well-bred, conventional determination to admittedly hear and see naught that was not intentionally addressed by his host to his observation. Baynell gave no outward and obvious sign of notice, but the subcurrent of brooding thought that occupied his mind was token of his evident comprehension and a nettled annoyance. Perhaps they all felt the relief from the tension when Ashley, suddenly glancing toward the window, saw between the long red curtains the section of a clearing sky and the glitter of a star.

"The storm is over," he said. "I think, Judge, we might venture out now to view the damage. I trust there is not much timber down."

The three men trooped heavily out into the hall, and suddenly the challenge of the sentry rang forth, simultaneously with the sound of the approach of horses' hoofs and the jingle of military accoutrements. Colonel Ashley's groom had bethought himself to bring up his master's charger in case he should care, since the weather had cleared, to return to camp. This Ashley preferred, despite Judge Roscoe's cordial insistence that he could put him up for the night without the slightest inconvenience.

As Ashley took leave of the family and galloped down the avenue in the chill damp air, and over the spongy turf, now and then constrained to turn aside to avoid fallen boughs, he had [Pg 78] not even a vague prevision how short an interval was to elapse before chance should bring him back. His expectation of meeting a charming young lady, with perhaps the sequel of an interesting flirtation, in which all his best qualities as squire of dames should be elicited for the admiration of the fair,—his preëminence in singing, in quoting poetry, in saying pretty things, in horsemanship, above all the killing glances of his arch dark eyes, to say naught of the relish he always experienced in his own excellent pose as a lover, one of his favorite rôles,—all had been nullified by Mrs. Gwynn's unresponsiveness. His vanity was touched, upon reflecting on the events of the evening. He did not feel entreated according to his merits by her attitude of a faded and elderly widow-woman, and his relegation to the puerilities of the little Old Maids, or little "ladies," or whatever they called themselves (certainly not the first), with Baynell playing the stick, and the old judge merely a galvanized Opinion. He resolved that he would stick to camp hereafter. He knew a game of "Draw" with no Old Maid in the pack, and he would solace his spare time with such diversion as it might afford, and look to the drill of his squadrons.

Nevertheless the moisture of the storm was scarcely sun-dried the next afternoon before he was again galloping up the long avenue of the grove and inquiring of old Janus, appropriately playing janitor, if Captain Baynell were within, as he had some special [Pg 79] business with him.

As on other occasions there was no glimpse or sound of feminine presence in the halls or on the stairs as he followed the old servant up the softly padded ascent. He fancied the old negro was much disaffected; he had a plaintive, remonstrant submissiveness, and a sort of curious, shadowy, aged look that seemed a concomitant of a sullen reproach. Had they been beyond earshot of the household, Ashley would have bidden the old man out with his grievance, but naught was said, and presently the door of Captain Baynell's bedroom closed upon him.

"Did you know that Tompkins had sent up here and impressed Mrs. Gwynn's horse?"

Baynell had not risen from a seat at an escritoire, where he seemed to have been writing, and Ashley was half across the room and had flung himself into a chair before the fire ere his friend could lay down the pen.

"Yes, I knew it."

"Why—why—how did he know they had the animal in the cellar? He was up here the day before yesterday, and that old darkey told him that the horse had already been pressed into service."

"He must have been put into the cellar earlier. You know we heard the animal there last night."

"Why—why—" Colonel Ashley stammered in his haste—"how did *Tompkins* know?" [Pg 80]

"How?—why, of course I notified him—this morning."

Vertnor Ashley was altogether inarticulate. Baynell replied to the surprise in his face.

"Why—whatever did you think I should do?"

"Hold your tongue, of course!—as I held mine! Why, I thought you were a friend of these people."

Baynell looked at him, surprised in turn. "And so I am."

"And they have been kindness itself to you!"

"But do they expect me to return their kindness by helping them deceive the government, or to hold back supplies the army needs? They are mistaken if they do! It is a matter of conscience!"

"Oh, a *little* thing like that—" Ashley snapped his fingers—"a lady's horse!"

"It is a matter of conscience!" Baynell reiterated.

"I tell you, my friend, I wouldn't have such a conscience as that in the house! It's a selfish beast—a raging monster! exceedingly deadly to the interests of other folks," Ashley retorted with his bright eyes aglow.

Baynell glanced out of the great window, with its white, embroidered muslin curtains, between which he could see the ranges in the distance, Roanoke in the mid-spaces, the white tents of the girdle of encampments on all the hillsides about the little city; at intervals, [Pg 81] held in cup-like hollows, were great glittering ponds of water, the accumulations of the storm, glassing the clouds like mirrors, and realizing to the eye the geologist's description of the prehistoric days when lakes were here.

A sudden suspicion was in Ashley's mind. His resolution was taken on the instant. "I hope you will advance no objection; but I intend to see Mrs. Gwynn and Judge Roscoe, and assure them that *I* had no part in giving this information to the quartermaster's department."

Baynell looked at him with an indignant retort rising to his lips, then laughed satirically.

"Do you imagine I left *you* under that imputation?"

"You consider it no imputation, but a duty. Now I don't see my duty in that light. And I prefer to make my position clear to them."

Baynell already had his hand on the bell-cord, and it was with pointed alacrity that he gave the order when old Ephraim appeared—"Please say to Mrs. Gwynn and Judge Roscoe that Colonel Ashley and Captain Baynell wish to speak to them a few minutes on a matter of business if they are at leisure."

Uncle Ephraim, in whose soul the misadventure about the horse was rankling deep, surlily assented, closed the door, and took his way downstairs.

"I recken *you* kin speak ter dem," he soliloquized,—"mos' ennything kin speak hyar. Who'd [Pg 82] 'a' thought dat ar horse, dat Ac'obat, would set out ter talk ter de folks in de lawberry, like no four-footed one hev' done since de days ob Balaam's ass. But I ain't never hearn dat de ass was fool enough ter got hisse'f pressed inter de Fed'ral army. 'Fore de Lawd, dat horse wish now he had held his tongue an' stayed in de wine-cellar, wid dat good feed, whar I put him."

Once in the library, the traits which so endeared Vertnor Ashley to himself, and eke to others, were amply in evidence. He was gentle, deferential, thoroughly straightforward and frank, albeit he saw the subject was a mortification to Judge Roscoe and abated his sense of his own dignity; still Ashley gave no offence.

"I understand. It was a matter of conscience with Captain Baynell," said Judge Roscoe, seeking to dispose of the question in few words. "I can have no displeasure against a man for obeying the dictates of his own conscience, as every man must."

"Well, I am happy to say I had no conscience in the matter," said Colonel Ashley.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mrs. Gwynn, with her curt, low, icy tone. "We have indeed fallen on evil times. Captain Baynell has conscience enough to destroy us all, if only he sees fit. And Colonel Ashley, by his own admission, has no conscience at all. Between the two we *must* [Pg 83] come to grief."

"It seems to me a trifle," Ashley persisted smilingly, "brought to my attention accidentally on a hospitable occasion. For aught *I* knew, you might have a permit, or the horse might have been a condemned animal, unsound, thus escaping the requisition. I had no orders to investigate your domestic affairs, nor to search for animals evading the impress. The men detailed to that duty are presumed to be capable of discharging it."

"I assure you we have no feeling on that account—no antagonism—" began Judge Roscoe.

"I desire you to realize that *nothing* would have induced me to report the presence of the horse here," Ashley interrupted; "though," he added, checking himself, "I do not wish to reflect on Captain Baynell's procedure!"

"He thought himself justified, indeed obligated," interposed Judge Roscoe.

"Of course I greatly regretted the necessity, which seemed forced on me, as I saw the matter," said Baynell.

"I fully appreciate that you take a different view," began Ashley.

"'O give ye good even. Here's a million of manners,'" quoted Mrs. Gwynn, satirically, smiling from one to the other as each sought to press forward his own view, yet to cast no reflections on the probity of the standpoint of the other.

Judge Roscoe laughed. He was an admirer of what he called "understanding in women," and [Pg 84] the mere flavor of a Shakespearian collocation of words refreshed his spirit like an oasis in a desert.

Ashley looked at her doubtfully. He wondered that they could forgive Baynell for this gratuitous bit of official tyranny, as it seemed to him, and also the serious loss of the value of the horse. He said to himself that almost any rule is constrained to exceptions. He thought Baynell's course was small-minded, unjustifiable, and an ungrateful requital of hospitality, such as only important interests might warrant. He did not reckon on the strength of the attachment which Judge Roscoe, despite politics, had formed for his dear friend's son, or for his respect for the coercive force of a man's convictions of the requirements of duty. It was a sort of Brutus-like urgency which appealed to a high sense of probity and which commended itself to the ex-judge, accustomed to deal with subtle differentiations of moral intent as well as intricate principles of sheer law.

As for Mrs. Gwynn—it was sufficient that she had lost the horse. She cared too little for either man as an individual to consider the delicate adjustment of the problem of official integrity involved.

"I surely should have lost every claim to your good opinion if I had glozed it over and passed it by for personal reasons," Baynell argued after Ashley had gone.

She looked at him speculatively for an instant, wondering what possible claim he could fancy [Pg 85] he possessed to her good opinion.

"If you think impressing a horse is a recommendation, a great many citizens of this town have cause to hold the quartermaster-general in high esteem. A perfect drove of horses passed here this afternoon. I looked for Acrobat, but I did not see him."

He was taken aback at this turn. "But you know, of course, it was against my own will—my own preference—the horse—it was a sacrifice on my part!"

"So glad to know it; I thought the sacrifice was mine!"

He shifted the subject.

"Judge Roscoe has kindly given me permission to stable here my own horses,—not belonging to the service,—and to use the pasture, and I hope you will ride one that I think is particularly suitable for a lady. Judge Roscoe, to show that he bears no malice, is riding another one to Roanoke City this afternoon."

She said that she had lost her equestrian tastes. But she listened quite civilly while he argued the ethics anew, and, as her interest in the subject had waned with the dissolving view of her horse and she did not care for the question in the abstract, she did not controvert his theory or relish placing obstacles to the justification of his course.

CHAPTER V [Pg 86]

Baynell's disposition to recur to the subject inaugurated a habit of conversation with Mrs. Gwynn after the scholastic hours of the "ladies," when he sat in the library through the long afternoons. The vast subject of the abstract values of right and wrong, the ultimate decrees of conscience, whether in matters of great or minute importance, might seem inexhaustible in itself. But he gradually drifted therefrom into a discursive monologue of many things. He began to talk of himself as never before, as he had never dreamed that he could. He described his friends and acquaintances; he rehearsed his experiences; he even repeated traditional stories of his father's college life, and the mad pranks which the staid Judge Roscoe had played in the callow days of their youth, thus emphasizing the bond of intimacy and his own claim to recognition as a hereditary friend; he went farther and detailed his own intimate plans for the future.

Throughout she maintained a conventional pose of courteous attention. Surely, he thought, he must have roused some responsive interest. For himself, in all his life, he had never experienced moments so surcharged with significance, with pleasure, with importance. One [Pg 87] day he concluded a long exposition of thought and conviction, intensely vital to him, by making a direct appeal to her opinion. She looked up with half-startled eyes, then hesitatingly replied, while a quick, deep flush sprang into her pale cheeks. Elated, confident, victorious, he beheld the color rise and glow, and noted her lingering, conscious embarrassment; for the subject was unimportant save as it concerned him, and why, but for his sake, should she blush and falter in sweet confusion?

How could he know that hardly one word in ten had she heard! Absent, absorbed, she was silently turning again and again the ashes of the dead past, while he, insistently, clamorously, was knocking at the door of the living present.

Step by step she had been retracing her early foolish fondness for the man who had been her husband. How could she have been so blind! she was asking herself. Why could she not have seen him with the eyes of others,—that wise, kindly, far-sighted vision which scanned the present with caution for her sake, and by its gauge measured the future with an unerring and an appalled accuracy? How contemptuously, like a heroine of romance indeed, she had flouted the well-meant opposition of her relatives to her marriage! They had proved wise prophets. Drunkard, gambler, spendthrift, he had wrecked her fortune and embittered her whole life. The two years she had spent with him seemed an æon of misery. They had [Pg 88] obliterated the past as well as excluded the future. Somehow she could not look beyond them into her earlier days save upon those gradations of events—the swift courtship, the egregious, headstrong, romantic resolution, the foolish love founded on false ideals which led her at last to the altar, so confiding, so happy, so disdainful of the grave faces and the disapproving shaking heads of all her elder kith and kindred, so triumphant in setting them at naught and enhancing Rufus Gwynn's victory with the quelling of their every claim.

In these long, quiet afternoons she would silently canvass humiliating details—when was it that she had first known him for the liar he was; when had she admitted to herself his inherent falsity? Even the truth had faltered for his sake. She had eagerly sought to deceive herself—to gloze over his lies, now told for a purpose, and constrained to their misleading device, now thrown off without intention or effect, as if the false were the more native incident of his moral atmosphere. Perhaps, with the love that possessed her, she, too, might have acquired the proclivity; she meditated on this possibility with a bowed head. At first, when he lied to her, she herself could not distinguish the truth from the false in his words. She had found herself at sea without a rudder. However she might have desired to protect him, whether she might have bent in time to deceit for his sake, there is a sort of monopoly [Pg 89] in falsehood. It is a game at which two cannot play to good effect. The first time he struck her full in the face was in the fury which possessed him, when, through her agency, a lie had been fairly fixed upon him. She had given him as her authority for a statement she made to Judge Roscoe, and her uncle had, in repeating it to him, discovered the lie—the blatant open lie—that could not be qualified or gainsaid.

And she had forgiven this, both the word and the blow. How strange! She made allowances for his irritation, for his mortification at the discovery by a man so upright, so ascetic, so unsympathetic with any moral weakness as Judge Roscoe. She offered to herself excuses which even she, however, in her inmost soul, hardly accepted—for the lie itself! He desired to avoid reproaches for mistaken arrangements about money matters, she had said to herself; he shrank from contention with her thus. Never dreaming that she might be questioned, he had been led to palliate, to distort the facts. For at first she would have no traffic with the ignoble word "lie." The restrictions of her own phrases began to have a sort of terror for her. She could no longer talk freely. She hardly dared make the most obvious statement concerning any simple fact of household affairs, or amusements, or visits, or friends, lest, in his prodigal untruth, for no reason,—the abandonment of folly, or a [Pg 90] momentary whim,—he should have committed himself and her unequivocally to some different effect. She hesitated, stammered, when she was in company,—faltered, blushed,—she who used to be so different!—while all her world stared. And when they were alone, he would storm at her for it, furiously mimicking her distressful uncertainty, her tremulous solicitude lest she openly convict him of lying continually. She sought to give him no occasion for anger, not that she so dreaded the hurt of his heavy hand, but that she might save him from the ignominy of striking his wife. She studied his face and conformed to his whims, and anticipated his wants, and forbore vexation. Her subjection was so obvious that while her own near friends raged inwardly, divining that he was unkind, their casual acquaintance sportively fleered, never dreaming how their arrows sped to the mark.

Their fleers nettled him; he was specially out of countenance one day because of a careless shaft of Mildred Fisher's.

"It is one of the beautiful aspects of matrimony that the law once recognized the right of a man to correct his wife with 'a stick not thicker than his thumb'; let me see the size of your thumb, Mr. Gwynn,—it must be that which keeps Leonora in this edifying state of subjection."

And when she had gayly gone her way, Rufus Gwynn bitterly upbraided his wife.

"Damn you!" he had cried; "can't you hold up your head at all?" [Pg 91]

Then it was that she had donned her most charming toilette—a dress of heavy white satin simple yet queenly—and had gone to one of those balls of the early times of the Confederacy, where the cavaliers were many and gay; she was all smiles and bright eyes, though these were the only jewels she wore, for had she not discovered at the moment of opening the case that her diamonds—Rufus Gwynn's own bridal gift to her—were missing!—sold, pawned, given away, it was never known. Thus seeking her duty in these devious ways and to do his choice credit, as a wife should, her charm held a court about her,—even Mildred Fisher, who loved splendor, ablaze with the collection of precious stones at her disposal, her mother's, her grandmother's, and her aunt's, was eclipsed. The glittering

officers followed the beautiful young wife in the promenade, and stood about and awaited the cessation of the whirl as she waltzed with one of the number, and devoutly held her bouquet while in the banqueting room, and drank her health and toasted her happiness, and broke her fan, soliciting a breeze for her comfort. The result?—When in the carriage homeward bound, she was fit to throw herself out of the window and under the wheels in sheer terror of the demon of jealousy she had aroused. Her husband loaded her with curses, he foamed at the mouth as he threatened the men with whom she had danced, more than [Pg 92] one of whom he had himself introduced for the purpose. He protested he would shoot Julius Roscoe because he had *not* asked her to dance, but had turned pale when he saw her, and had stood in the shadows of the columns at the upper end of the ball room and with melancholy, love-lorn eyes watched her in the waltz. When she declared she had not seen Julius, she had not spoken to him—"You dare not!" he cried. And but that she clutched his arm, he would have sprung from the vehicle in motion to hide in the shrubbery—the pine hedge—as they passed Judge Roscoe's gate, to shoot Julius in the back as he went home from the ball,—in the back, in the darkness, from ambush, that none might know! Then as her husband could not force himself from her grasp, he turned and struck her across the face twice, heavily.

All her soldier friends, old playmates, youthful compeers, elder associates, marched away without a farewell word from her,—a last farewell it would have been to many, who, alack, came never marching back again; for she was denied at the door to all callers, since her bruises were so deep and lacerated that she must needs keep her room in order that the conjugal happiness might not be impugned. For still she made excuses for Gwynn, sought to shield him from himself. He had begun to drink heavily under the sting of the universal financial disasters occasioned by the war which he also shared, supplemented by heavy [Pg 93] losses at the gaming table and the race track and often "was not himself," as she phrased it. He was expert at repentance, practised in confession, and had a positive ingenuity for shifting responsibility to stronger shoulders. He could burst into torrents of protesting tears, and dramatically fling himself on his knees at her feet, and bury his face in her hands, covering them with kisses, and craving her pardon and help. And she would once more, inconsistently, hopefully, take up her faith in him anew, albeit it had all the tearful tremors of despair,—believing, yet doubting, with a strange duality of emotion impossible to the analysis of reason. Thus the curtain was rung up again, and the terrible tragedy of her life on this limited stage went on apace.

He had infinite ingenuity in concealment, abetted by her silence in suffering which her pride fostered. Albeit her friends had divined his unkindness, the extent of his brutality was not suspected by them until one night when frightful screams had been heard to issue from the house, despite the closed and shuttered windows of winter weather. These were elicited by the sheer agony of being dragged by the hair through the rooms and halls and down the stairs, and thrust out into the chill of the fierce January freeze. She was given hardly time for the instinct of flight to assert itself, to rise up with wild eyes looking adown the snowy [Pg 94] street; for the door opened, and he dragged her within once more, as a watchman of the precinct, Roanoke City being at this time heavily policed, ascended the steps to the portico with an inquiry as to the sound. He was satisfied with the explanation from the husband that Mrs. Gwynn was suffering with a violent attack of hysterics. But the next day, while the mistress of the house, bruised and almost shattered, lay half unconscious in her own room, the housemaid, in the hall polishing the stair rail and wainscot, was terrified to draw out here and there from the balusters great bloody lengths of Mrs. Gwynn's beautiful hair which had caught and held as she was dragged by it down the stairs. This rumor, taken in connection with the explanation of her screams offered by her husband to the watchman, occasioned Mrs. Gwynn's relatives great anxiety for her safety. It was with the view of discovering from her the truth, insisting on its disclosure as a matter of paramount importance, that Judge Roscoe as her nearest kinsman and former guardian had suggested a ride with her, when in the quiet of an uninterrupted conversation he intended to remonstrate against her lack of candor, seek to ascertain the facts, and then devise some measures looking toward the betterment of the unhappy situation.

The slaughter by Rufus Gwynn of the unoffending horse had eliminated the necessity alike of [Pg 95] remonstrance or advice. Her ideals, her hope, her love, were destroyed as by one blow. Her resolution of separation was taken and, albeit her anxious friends feared her capacity for forgiveness was not exhausted, it proved final. The end came on the day that Rufus Gwynn's horse, rearing under whip and spur, and falling, broke his rider's neck.

This was her romance and her awakening from love's young dream. These were the scenes that she lived over and over. This was her past that every moment of leisure converted into her present,—palpable, visible, vital,—and her future seemed bounded only by the possibilities of retrospect.

With the many-thonged scourge of her memory how could she listen to the monologue of this stranger! Thus it was that her attentive attitude was suddenly stultified by his direct appeal to her. Thus she had reddened and faltered in embarrassment for the rude solecism, and gathered her faculties for some hesitant semblance of polite response.

Lapsed in the delight of his fool's paradise, Baynell discerned naught of the truth. Left presently alone in the library, he serenely watched through the long window the slow progress of the shadows following the golden vernal sunshine throughout the grove. The

wind faintly stirred, barely enough to shake the bells of the pink and darkly blue hyacinths standing tall and full in the parterre at one side of the house. The plangent tone of a single key, struck on the grand piano, fell on the stillness within, and after a time another, and slowly still another, in doubting ascension of the gamut, as one of the "ladies" submitted to the cruelty of a music lesson. His lip smilingly curved at the thought. And still gazing out in serene languor, all unprescient, he once more noted the spring sun of that momentous day slowly westering, westering. [Pg 96]

A red sky it found at the horizon; a chill wind starting up over a purple earth spangled with golden camp-fires. Presently the world was sunk in a slate-tinted gloom, and the night came on raw and dark, with moon and stars showing only in infrequent glimpses through gusty clouds. A great fire had burned out on the library hearth; the group had genially sat together till the candles were guttering in their sockets in the old crystal-hung candelabra. Judge Roscoe still lingered, smoking, meditating before the embers. All the house was asleep, silent save for the martial tread of the sentry walking to and fro before the portico. Suddenly Judge Roscoe heard a sound, alien, startling,—a sound at the side window. The room was illumined by a pervasive red glow from the embers, in which he saw his own shadow, gigantic, gesticulatory, as he rose to his feet, listening again to—silence! Only the wind rustling in the lilac hedge, only the ring of the sentry's step, crisp and clear on the frosty air.

The moment that the soldier turned to retrace his way to the farther side of the house, there came once more that grating sound at the window, distinct, definite, of sinister import. [Pg 97]

For one instant Judge Roscoe was tempted to call for the sentry's aid. The next the shutter opened, the sash glided up noiselessly, and, as the old gentleman gazed spellbound with starting eyes and chin a-quiver, a tiny flame flickered up, keenly white amongst the embers, illuminating the room, revealing the object at the window. Only for one moment; for in a frenzy of energy Judge Roscoe had caught up the heavy velvet rug and, as he held it against the aperture of the chimney, the room once more sunk into indistinguishable gloom; the sudden bounding entrance of an agile figure was wholly invisible to the sentry, albeit he was almost immediately under the window, peering in with a stern "Who goes there?"

"There seems something amiss with the catch of the shutter," said the placid voice of the master of the house, who had left the rug still standing on its thick edge before the chimney place. "Can you help me there? Thank you very much."

The sentry muttered a sheepish apology, pleading the unusual noise at this hour. His excuse was cheerfully accepted. "It is well to be on the alert. Good night!"

"Good night, sir!" And once more there sounded through the sombre air the martial beat of the sentry's tread on the frosty ground. [Pg 98]

Then two men in the darkness within, reaching out in the gloom, fell into each other's arms with tears of joy, but presently reproaches too. "Oh, my son, my son! why did you come here?"

"Came a-visiting!" said a voice out of the obscurity, with a boy's buoyant laughter. "The picket-lines are so close to-night, I couldn't resist slipping in. Is Leonora here? How are my dear little nieces,—the 'ladies'?"

"Oh, Julius! My boy, this is so dangerous!"

"I'd risk ten times more to hear your dear voice again—" with a rib-cracking hug—"only think, father, it's more than two years now since I have seen you! I want to see Leonora ten minutes and kiss the 'ladies,' and then I'm off again in a day or so, and none the wiser."

"No, no, that is out of the question! No one must know. The camps are too close; you must have seen them, even in the grove."

"Why, I can lie low."

"And there is a—" Judge Roscoe hardly knew how to voice it—"a—a Yankee officer in the house."

"Thunderation! The dickens there is! Why—"

"There is no time to explain; you must go back at once, while the Federal pickets are so close, and you can slip through the line. It's just at the creek."

"But they have thrown it out since dark, five miles. Our fellows skedaddled back to their support. And I tell you it will never do for me to be caught inside the lines. The Yankees might think I was spying around!" [Pg 99]

Judge Roscoe turned faint and sick. Then, rising to the emergency, and considering the suspicions the sound of voices here at this hour of the night might excite in the mind of the sentry, he grasped his son's arm, with a warning clutch imposing silence, and led him along the dark hall, groping up the staircase. As the boy was about to bolt in the direction of his former chamber, his father turned the corner to the second flight.

"Sky parlor, is it?" the young daredevil muttered, as they stumbled together up the steep ascent to the garret.

A dreary place it showed as they entered, large, low ceiled, extending above the whole expanse of the square portion of the house. It was lighted only by the windows at either side; through one of these pale watery glimmers were falling from a moon which rolled heavily like a derelict in the surges of the clouds. This sufficed to show to each the other's beloved face; and that Judge Roscoe's ribs were not fractured in the hugs of the filial young bear betokened the enduring strength of his ancient physique.

The place was sorely neglected since the reduction of the service in the old house. Cobwebs had congregated about ceiling and windows; the dust was thick on rows of old trunks, which [Pg 100] annotated the journeyings of the family since the hair-covered, brass-studded style was the latest fashion to the sole leather receptacle that bore the initials of Judge Roscoe's dead wife, and the gigantic "Saratoga" that had served in Mrs. Gwynn's famous wedding journey. There were many specimens of broken chairs, and some glimmering branching girandoles, five feet high, that had illumined the house at one of the great weddings of long ago. A large cedar chest, proof against moths, preserved the ancient shawls and gowns of beauties of by-gone times, who little thought this ephemeral toggery would survive them. Certain antiquated pieces of furniture, hardly meet for the more modern assortment below,—chests of drawers surmounted by quaint little cabinets with looking-glasses, a lumbering wardrobe that seemed built for high water and stood on four long stilt-like legs, a pair of old mantel mirrors, wide and low, with tarnished gilded frames, dividing the reflecting surface into three equal sections, a great barometer that surlily threatened stormy weather, clumsy bureaus, bedsteads, each with four tall "cluster posts" surmounted by testers of red, quilled cloth drawn to a brass star in the centre, fire-dogs and fenders of dull brass—all were grouped here and there. One of these bedsteads had been occupied on some occasion when the house had been overcrowded, for the cords that sufficed in lieu of the more modern slats [Pg 101] now supported a huge feather-bed. Judge Roscoe threw on it a carriage rug that had been hung to air on a cord which was stretched across one corner of the room. He almost fainted at a sudden, frightened clutch upon his arm, and, turning, saw his son in the agonies of panic, his teeth chattering, his eyes starting out of his head, his hand pointing tremulously toward the bed, as if bereft of his senses, demanding to be informed what that object might be. It was the time-honored joke of the young Southern soldiers that they had not seen or slept in a bedstead for so long that the mere sight of so unaccustomed a thing threw them into convulsions of fear. His father forgave the genuine tremors the joke had occasioned him for the joker's sake, and as Julius, flinging off his cap, coat, and boots, stretched out at his long length luxuriously, he stood by the pillow and admonished him of the plan of the campaign.

The Yankee officer had been ill, Judge Roscoe explained, and, convalescing now, joined the family in their usual gathering places—the library, dining room, on the portico, in the grove. If Leonora or the "ladies" knew of the presence here of Julius, they could hardly preserve in this close association with the enemy an unaffected aspect; so significant a secret might be betrayed in facial expression, a tone of voice, a nervous start. This would be fatal; his life might prove the forfeit. It was a mistake to come, and this mistake must forthwith be [Pg 102] annulled. Despite the man in the house, Julius could lie perdu here in the garret, observing every precaution of secrecy, till the ever shifting picket-line should be drawn close enough to enable him to hope to reach it without challenge. They would confide in trusty old Ephraim. He would maintain a watch and bring them news. And old Ephraim, too, would bring up food, cautiously purloined from the table.

"The typical raven! appropriately black!" murmured Julius.

"Are you hungry now, dear?" Judge Roscoe asked disconsolately, after telling him that he must wait till morning.

"If you have such a thing as the photograph of a chicken about you, I should be glad to see it," Julius murmured demurely.

Judge Roscoe bent down and kissed him good night on the forehead, then turned to pick his way carefully among the debris of the old furniture. Soon he had reached the stairway, and noiseless as a shadow he flitted down the flight.

The young officer lay for a while intently listening, but no stir reached his ear; naught; absolute stillness. For a long time, despite his fatigue, the change, the pleasant warmth, the soft luxury of the feather-bed, would not let him slumber. He was used to the canopy of heaven, the chill ground, the tumult of rain; the sense of a roof above his head was unaccustomed, and he was stiflingly aware of its propinquity. Nevertheless he contrasted its [Pg 103] comfort with his own recent plight and that of his comrades a few miles away, lying now asleep under the security of their camp-guards, some still in the mud of the trenches, all on the cold ground, shelterless, half frozen, half starved, ill, destitute, but fired with a martial ardor and a zeal for the Southern cause which no hardship could damp, and only death itself might quench. As he gazed about at the grotesqueries of the great room, now in the sheen of the moon, and now in the shadow of the cloud, he thought how little he had anticipated finding the enemy here ensconced in his place in his father's house, a convalescent, "the son of an old friend, of whom we have all grown very fond." He raged inwardly at the destruction of his cherished plans wrought by the mere presence of the Federal officer. The joy of his visit was brought to naught. Dangerous as it would have been under the best auspices, its peril was now great and imminent. Instead of the meeting his thoughts had cherished,—the

sweets of the stolen hours at the domestic fireside, with the dear faces that he loved, the dulcet voices for which he yearned,—he was to skulk here, undreamed of, like some unhappy ghost haunting a lonely place, fortunate indeed if he might chance to be able to make off elusively after the fashion of the spectral gentry, without becoming a ghost in serious earnest by the event of capture, or catching the pistol ball of the Yankee officer. So much he had risked for this visit—life and limb!—and to be relegated to the surplusage of the garret, [Pg 104] the loneliness, the desolate moon, the deserted dust of the unfrequented place! He was to approach none of them—none of the hearthstone group! There was to be no joyous greeting, no stealthy laughter, no interchange of loving words, and clasps, and kisses. He was still young; his eyes filled, his throat closed. But that shadowy glimpse of his dear father—he had had that boon!

"I'll remember it, if I bite the dust in the next skirmish. And the question is to get away—for the next skirmish!"

Once more he fell to studying mechanically the grouping of the archaic, disordered furniture; the shifting of the shadows amongst it as a cloud sped by with the wind; the spare boughs of a bare aspen tree etched on the floor by the moon, shining down through the high windows; and that melancholy orb itself, suggestive of a futile vanished past, a time forgotten, and spent illusions, the familiar of loneliness, and the deep empty hours of the midnight—itself a spectre of a dead planet, haunting its wonted pathway of the skies. When its light ceased to fill his lustrous, contemplative eyes he did not know, but as the moon passed on to the west, his melancholy gaze had ceased to follow.

CHAPTER VI [Pg 105]

Joy came in the morning when the raven alighted. The "two-faced Janus" was wreathed in smiles, bent double with chuckles, and tears of delight sparkled in his eyes.

"How dee is growed!" he whispered cautiously. "Mannish now, fur true. Gawd! de han'somest one ob de fam'ly!" For, with the refreshment of sleep and the substance, not merely the similitude, of fried chicken, waffles, and coffee, Julius, in the gray uniform of a first lieutenant, made a very gallant show despite the incongruities of the piled-up lumber of the old garret. He had a keen, high, alert profile, his nose a trifle aquiline; his complexion was fair and florid; his eyes were a fiery brown, his hair, of the same rich tint, was now and again tossed impatiently backward, the style of the day being an inconvenient length, for it was worn to hang about the collar. He had a breezy, offhand, impetuous manner, evidently only bridled in by rigorous training to decorous forms, and he stood six feet one inch in his stockings, taller now by one inch more in his boots, which the old servant had helped him to draw on. "Lawd-a-massy! dis de baby?" cried the old negro, admiringly, still on his knees, [Pg 106] contemplating the young officer as he took a turn through the apartment with his straight-brimmed cap on his head and his hand on his sword. "'Fore Gawd, whut sorter baby is dis yere—over six feet high?"

"Wish I was a baby for about two hours, Uncle Ephraim! You could carry me 'pickaback' through the Yankee lines!"

"Hue-come ye run dem lines, Marse Julius? I reckon, dough, you hatter see Miss Leonora," said the discerning old darkey. "'Fore de Lawd, she hed better be wearin' dem widder's weeds fur de good match she flung away in you 'stead o' fur dat ar broken-necked man whut's daid, praise de Lamb!"

If Julius joined in this pious thanksgiving, he made no outward sign. He only flushed slightly as he asked constrainedly, "Is she wearing mourning yet?"

"Yes, sah, to be shore. Dis yere Yankee man, whut ole Marster an' de 'ladies' an' all invited to stay yere, he is gwine round Miss Leonora mighty smilin' an' perlite an' humble. Dat man behaves lak he is mos' too modes' ter say his prayers! 'Anything ye got lef' over, good Lawd, will do Baynell, especially a lef'-over widder 'oman!' Dat's his petition ter de throne ob grace!"

Oh, double-faced Janus!—now partisan of the Rebel, erstwhile so friendly with "de Yankee man."

"Ef 'twarn't fur him, yer Pa could come up yere an' smoke a *see*gar an' talk, an' Miss [Pg 107] Leonora an' de ladies mought play kyerds wid dee wunst in a while, wid dem blinds kept closed."

"He isn't such an awful Tartar, is he, Uncle Ephraim?" said Julius, plaintively, allured by this picture. "Wouldn't he wink at it, if he missed them or heard voices, or caught a suspicion of my being here? They have been so good to him—and I am doing nothing aggressive—only visiting the family."

"*Lawsy—Lawsy—Lawsy-massy, no! No!*" cried Uncle Ephraim, in extreme agitation and with the utmost emphasis of negation. "Dat man is afflicted wid a powerful oneasy conscience, Marse Julius!"

And he detailed with the most convincing and graphic diction the disaster that had befallen the too-confiding Acrobat.

Julius was very definitely impressed with the imminence of his peril. "The son of Belial!" he exclaimed in dismay.

"Naw sah,—*dat* ain't his daddy's Christian name," said Uncle Ephraim, ingenuously. "'Tain't Benial!—dough it's mighty nigh ez comical. Hit's '*Fluellen*'—same ez dis man's. I hearn ole Marster call it—but what you laffin' at? Dee bed better come out'n dat duck-fit! Folks can hear ye giggling plumb down ter de Big Gate!"

He was constrained to take himself downstairs presently, lest he be missed, although [Pg 108] longing to continue his discourse. His caution in his departure, his crafty listening for sounds from below before he would trust his foot to the stair, his swift, gliding transit to the more accustomed region of the second story, the art he expended in concealing in a dust cloth the bowl in which he had conveyed "the forage," as Julius called it—all were eminently reassuring to the man who stood in such imminent peril for a casual whim as he gazed after "the raven's" flight.

Solitary, silent, isolated, the day became intolerably dull to the young soldier as it wore on. He dared not absorb himself in a book, although there were many old magazines in a case which stood near the stairs, for thus he might fail to note an approach. Once he heard the treble babble of two of the "ladies" and the strange, infrequent harsh tone of the deaf-mute, and he paused to murmur, "Bless their dear little souls!" with a tender smile on his face. And suddenly, his attention still bent upon the region below stairs, so unconscious of his presence above, there came to him the full, mellow sound of a stranger's voice, a well-bred, decorous voice with a conventional but pleasant laugh; and then, both in the hallway now, Leonora's drawling contralto, with its cantabile effects, her speech seeming more beautiful than the singing of other women. The front door closed with a bang, and Julius realized that [Pg 109] they had gone forth together. He stood in vague wonderment and displeasure. Was it possible, he asked himself, that she really received this man's attentions, appeared publicly in his company, accepted his escort? Then, to assure himself, he sprang to the window and looked out upon the grove.

There was the graceful figure of his dreams in her plain black bombazine dress worn without the slightest challenge to favor, the black crape veil floating backward from the ethereally fair face, the glittering gold-flecked brown hair beneath the white ruche, called the "widow's cap," in the edge of her bonnet. Her fine gray eyes were cast toward the house with a languid smile as the "ladies" tapped on the pane of the library window and signed farewell. Beside her Julius scanned a tall, well-set-up man in a blue uniform and the insignia of a captain of artillery, with blond hair and beard, a grave, handsome face, a dignified manner, a presence implying many worldly and social values.

This walk was an occasion of moment to Baynell. The opportunity had arisen in the simplest manner.

There was to be the funeral of a friend of Judge Roscoe's in the neighborhood, and at the table he had been arranging how "the family should be represented," to use his formal phrase, for business necessitated his absence.

"But I will walk over with *you*, Leonora, although I cannot stay for the services. I will call by [Pg 110] for you later."

It was natural, both in the interests of civility and his own pleasure, that Baynell should offer to take the old gentleman's place, urging that an officer was the most efficient escort in the unsettled state of the country; and, indeed, how could they refuse? He, however, thought only of her acceptability to him. Apart from her beauty he had never known a woman who so conformed to his ideals of the appropriate, despite the grotesque folly of her blighted romance. It was only her nobility of nature, he argued, that had compassed her unhappiness in that instance. The graces of her magnanimity would not have been wasted on him, he protested inwardly. He appreciated that they were fine and high qualities thus cast before swine and ruthlessly trampled underfoot. She herself had lacked in naught—but the unworthy subject of the largess of her heart.

It was Baynell who talked as they took their way through the grove and down the hill. Now and again she lifted her eyes, murmured assent, seemed to listen, always subacutely following the trend of her own reflections.

He would not intrude into the house of affliction, being a stranger, he said, and therefore he strolled about outside during the melancholy obsequies, patiently waiting till she came out again and joined him. She seemed cast down, agitated; he thought her of a delicately [Pg 111] sensitive organization.

"How familiar death is becoming in these war times!" she said drearily, when they were out of the crowd once more and fairly homeward bound. "There was not one woman of the

hundred in that house who is not wearing mourning."

She rarely introduced a topic, and, with more alacrity than the subject might warrant, he spoke in responsive vein on the increased losses in battle as arms are improved, presently drifting to the comparison of statistics of the mortality in hospitals, the relative chances for life under shell or musketry fire, the destructive efficacy of sabre cuts, and the military value of cavalry charges. The cavalry fought much now on foot, he said, using the carbine, but this reduced the efficiency of the force one-fourth, the necessary discount for horse-holders; he thought there was great value in the cavalry charge, with the unsheathed sabre; it was like the rush of a cyclone; only few troops, well disciplined, could hold their ground before it; thus he pursued the subject of cognate interest to his profession. And meantime she was thinking only of these women, mourning their dead and dear, while she—the hypocrite—wore the garb of the bereaved to emphasize her merciful and gracious release. She wondered how she had ever endured it, she who hated deceit, a fanciful pose, and the empty [Pg 112] conventions, she who did not mourn save for her lost exaltations, her wasted affection, the hopeless aspirations—all the dear, sweet illusions of life! Perhaps she had owed some compliance with the customs of mere widowhood, the outward respect to the status. Well, then, she had paid it; farther than this she would not go.

The next morning as Captain Baynell took his seat at the breakfast-table she was coming in through the glass door from the parterre at one side of the dining room, arrayed in a mazarine blue mousseline-de-laine flecked with pink, a trifle old-fashioned in make, with a bunch of pink hyacinths in her hand, their delicate cold fragrance filling all the room.

Even a man less desirous of being deceived than Baynell might well have deduced a personal application. He was sufficiently conversant with the conventions of feminine attire to be aware that this change was something of the most sudden. His finical delicacy was pained to a certain extent that the casting off her widow's weeds could be interpreted as a challenge to a fresh romance. But he argued that if this were for his encouragement, surely he should not cavil at her candor, for it would require a bolder man than he to offer his heart and hand under the shadow of that swaying crape veil. Nevertheless when his added confidence showed in his elated eyes, his assured manner, she stared at him for a moment with a surprise so obvious that it chilled the hope ardently aglow in his consciousness. The [Pg 113] next instant realizing that all the eyes at the table were fixed on her blooming attire, noting the change, she flushed in confusion and vexation. She had not counted on being an object of attention and speculation.

Judge Roscoe's ready tact mitigated the stress of the situation. "Leonora," he said, "you look like the spring! That combination of sky-blue and peach-blow was always a favorite with your aunt,—French taste, she called it. It seems to me that the dyes of dress goods were more delicate then than now; that is not something new, is it?"

"Oh, no; a worn-out thing, as old as the hills!" she answered casually.

And so the subject dropped.

It was renewed in a different quarter.

Old Ephraim was sitting on the floor in the garret, while his young master, adroitly balanced in a crazy arm-chair with three legs, was scraping with a spoon the bottom of the bowl that had contained "the forage."

Julius made these meals as long as he dared, so yearning he was for the news of the dear home life below, so tantalized by its propinquity and yet its remoteness. He was barred from it by his peril and the presence of the Federal officer as if he were a thousand miles away. But old Ephraim came freshly from its scenes; from the table that he served, around which [Pg 114] the familiar faces were grouped; from the fireside he replenished, musical with the voices that Julius loved. He caught a glimpse, he heard an echo, through the old gossip's talk, and thus the symposium was prolonged. The old negro told the neighborhood news as well; who was dead, and how and why they died; who was married, and how and when this occurred; what ladies "received Yankee officers," for some there were who put off and on their political prejudices as easily as an old glove; what homes had been seized for military purposes or destroyed by the operations of war.

"De Yankees built a fote on Marse Frank Devrett's hill," he remarked of the home of a relative of the Roscoes.

"Which side," demanded the boy; "toward the river?"

"Todes de souf."

"Pshaw! Uncle Ephraim, it couldn't be the south; the crest of the hill slopes that way," Julius contradicted, still actively plying the spoon. "You don't know north from south; you don't know gee from haw!"

"'Twas de souf, now! 'Twas de souf!" protested the old servant.

"Now look here," argued Julius, beginning to draw with the spoon upon the broad, dusty top of a cedar chest close by. "Here is the Dripping Spring road, and here runs the turnpike. [Pg 115] Now here is the rise of the hill, and—"

"Dar is Gen'al Belden's cavalry brigade camped at de foot," put in Uncle Ephraim, rising on his knees, taking a casual interest in cartography.

"And here is the bend of the river,"—the bowl of the spoon made a great swirl to imply the broad sweep of the noble Tennessee.

"Dat's whar dey got some infantry, four reg'ments."

"I see," with several dabs to mark the spot, "convenient for embarkation."

"An' dar," said the old man, unaware of any significance in the disclosure, "is one o' dem big siege batteries hid ahint de bresh—"

"Masked, hey? to protect launching and prevent approach by water; they *are* fixed up mighty nice! And here goes the slope of the hill to the fort."

"No, dat's de ravelin, de covered way, an' de par'pet."

"As far down as this, Uncle Ephraim? surely not!"

"Now, ye ain't so much ez chipped de shell ob dis soldierin' business, ye nuffin' but a onhatched deedie! An' yere I been takin' ye fur a perfessed soldier-man! You lissen! *yere* is de covered way ob de ravelin, outside ob a redoubt, whar dey got a big traverse wid a powder-magazine built into it. I been up dar when dis artillery captain sent his wagons arter his ammunition."

"About where is the magazine located?" demanded Julius, gravely intent. [Pg 116]

"Jes' dar—dar—"

"No, no!" cried the Confederate officer, in a loud, elated voice.

The old servant caught him by the sleeve, trembling and with a warning finger lifted. Then they were both silent, intently listening.

The sunlight across the garret floor lay still, save for the bright bar of glittering, dancing motes. The tall aspen tree by the window made no sound as it touched the pane with its white velvet buds. A wasp noiselessly flickered up and down the glass. Absolute quietude, save for a gentle, continuous murmur of voices in conversation in the library below.

"I'se gwine ter take myse'f away from yere," said old Janus, loweringly, his eyes full of reproach, his nerves shaken by the sudden fright. "Ye ain't fitten fur dis yere soldierin' business; jes' pipped de shell. You gwine ter git yerself cotched by dat ar Yankee man whut we-all done loaded ourself up wid, an' *den* whar will ye be? He done got well enough ter knock down a muel, an' I dunno *why* he don't go on back ter his camp. Done wore out his welcome yere, good-fashion!"

But Julius had entirely recovered from the *contretemps*. He was gazing in fixed intentness at the map drawn in the dust on the smooth, polished top of the cedar chest.

"Uncle Ephraim," he said in an impressive whisper, "this powder-magazine is built right over a cave! I *know*, because there is a hole, a sort of grotto down in the grove, where you can go in; and in half a mile you come right up against the wall of my cousin Frank Devrett's cellar. We played off ghost tricks there one Christmas, the Devrett boys and me, singing and howling in the cave, and it made a great mystery in the house, frightening my Cousin Alice; but Cousin Frank was in the secret." [Pg 117]

"Gimme—gimme dat spoon! I don't keer if de Yankees built deir magazine in de *well* instead ob de cellar. I'm gwine away 'fore dat widder 'oman begins arter me 'bout dat spoon an' bowl! Gimme de bowl, sah, it's de salad bowl!"

"Oh, I see," still pondering on the map; "they utilized part of the cellar, the wine vault, blown out of the solid rock, for the bottom of the powder-magazine to save work, and then covered it over with the traverse, and—"

"Gimme dat bowl, Marse Julius, dat widder 'oman will be on our track direc'ly. She keeps up wid every silver spoon as if she expected ter own 'em one day! But shucks! *you* gwine ter miss her again, wid all dis foolishness ob playin' Rebel soldier. Dat ar widder 'oman is all dressed out in blue an' pink ter-day, an' dat Yankee man smile same ez a possum!"

Julius Roscoe's absorption dropped in an instant. "You are an egregious old fraud!" he cried impetuously. "I saw her myself, yesterday, dressed in deep mourning." [Pg 118]

"Thankee, sah!" hoarsely whispered the infuriated old negro. "Ye'se powerful perlite ter pore ole Ephraim, whut's worked faithful fur you Roscoes all de days ob his life. I reckon I'se toted ye a thousand miles on dis ole back! An' I larned *ye* how ter feesh an' ter dig in the gyarden,—dough ye is a mighty pore hand wid a hoe,—an' ter set traps fur squir'ls, an' how ter find de wild bee tree. An' dem fine house sarvants never keered half so much fur ye ez de ole cawnfield hand; an' now dey hes all lef', an' de plantation gangs have all gone, too, an' ye would lack yer vittles ef 'twarn't fur de ole cawnfield hand! I'll fetch ye yer breakfus', sah, in de mornin', fur all ye are so perlite. Thankee, kindly, sah, callin' *me* names!"

And he took his way down the stair. Albeit in danger of capture and death, Julius flew across

the floor to the head of the flight, beguilingly beckoning the old negro to return, for the ministering raven had cast up reproachful eyes as he faced about on the first landing. Although obviously relenting, and placated by the tacit apology, the old servant obdurately shook his head surlily. Julius jocosely menaced him with his fists; then, as the gray head finally disappeared, the young man with a sudden change of sentiment strode restlessly up and down the clear space of the garret, feeling more cast down and ill at ease than ever before. [Pg 119]

"Oh, why did I come home!" Julius said over and again, reflecting on his heady venture and its scanty joy. It seemed that the great unhappiness of his life was about to be repeated under his eyes; once before he had witnessed the woman he loved won by another man. Then, however, he was scarcely more than a mere boy; now he was older, and the defeat would go more harshly with him. But was he not even to enter the lists, to break a lance for her favor? Although he had controverted the idea of her doffing her weeds in this connection, he now nothing doubted the fact. Her choice was made, the die was cast. And he stood here a fugitive in his father's house, in peril of capture—nay, it might be even his neck, the shameful death of a spy—that he might once more look upon her face!

He could not be calm, he could no longer be still; and ceaselessly treading to and fro after the house had long grown quiet, and the brilliant radiance of the moon was everywhere falling through the broad, tall windows, his restless spirit was tempted beyond the bounds of the shadowy staircase that he might at least, wandering like some unhappy ghost, see again the old familiar haunts. He passed through the halls, silent, slow, unafraid, as if invested with invisibility. He was grave, heavy-hearted, as aloof from all it once meant as if he were indeed some sad spirit revisiting the glimpses of the moon. Now and again he paused to gaze on some arrangement of sofas or chairs familiar to his earlier youth. By this big window always lay the backgammon-board. There was the old guitar, with memory, moonlight, romantic dreams, all entangled in the strings! It had been a famous joke to drag that light card-table before the pier glass, which reflected the hand of the unwary gamester. He sank down in a great fauteuil in the library, and through the long window on the opposite side of the room he could see the sheen of the moonlight lying as of old amidst the familiar grove. [Pg 120]

The sentry, with his cap and light blue overcoat, its cape fluttering in the breeze, ever and anon marched past, his musket shouldered, all unaware of the eyes that watched him; the budding trees cast scant shadows, spare and linear, on the dewy turf; the flowers bloomed all ghostly white in the parterre at one side. So might he indeed revisit the scene were he dead, Julius thought; so might he silently, listlessly, gaze upon it, his share annulled, his hope bereft.

Were he really dead, he wondered, could he look calmly at Leonora's book where she had laid it down? He knew its owner from her habit of marking the place with a flower; it held a long blooming rod of the *Pyrus Japonica*, the blossoms showing a scarlet glow even in the pallid moonlight. One of the "ladies" had cast on the floor her "nun's bonnet," a tube-like straw covering, fitted with lining and curtain of blue barège and blue ribbons; that belonged to Adelaide, he was sure, the careless one, for the bonnets of the other two "nuns" hung primly on the rack in the side hall. His father's pen and open portfolio lay on the desk, and there too was the pipe that had solaced some knotty perplexity of his business affairs, growing complicated now in the commercial earthquake that the war had superinduced. [Pg 121]

Without doubt more troublous times yet were in store. Julius rose suddenly. He must not add to these trials! He must exert every capacity to compass his safe withdrawal from this heady venture, for his father's sake as well as his own. With this monition of duty the poor ghost bade farewell to the scene that so allured him, the old home atmosphere so dear to his sense of exile, and took his way silently, softly, up the stairs.

He met the dawn at the head of the flight, filtering down from a high window. It fell quite distinct on the map of the town and its defences that he had drawn, in the dust on the polished top of the cedar chest, and suddenly a thought came to him altogether congruous with the garish day.

"I know a chief of artillery who would like mightily to hear where that masked battery is! I do believe he could reach it from Sugar Loaf Pinnacle if he could get a few guns up there!"

Then he was reminded anew of the subterranean secret passage from the grotto in the grove through the cave to the cellar of the old Devrett place, where now there was a powder-magazine. "I'd like to get out of the lines with that map set in my head precisely." He thought for a minute with great concentration. "Better still, I'll draw it off on paper." [Pg 122]

He had half a mind to take Uncle Ephraim into his confidence to procure pencils and paper, but a prudent monition swayed him. This was going far, very far! He would possess himself of the map duly drawn, but he would share this secret with no one. He resolved that when next the family should be out of the house, for daily they and their invalid guest strolled for exercise in the grove or wandered among the flowers in the old-fashioned garden, he would then venture into the library quietly and secure the materials.

The opportunity, however, did not occur till late in the afternoon. He did not postpone the quest for a midnight hazard, for he daily hoped that with the darkness might come news of the drawing in of the picket-lines, affording him a better chance to make a run for escape.

Hence it so happened that when the elder members of the household came in to tea, they found the "ladies" already at the table, the twins gloomily whimpering, the dumb child with an elated yet scornful air, her bright eyes dancing.

They had seen a ghost, the twins protested. [Pg 123]

"Oh, fie! fie!" their grandfather uneasily rebuked them, and Captain Baynell turned with the leniency of the happy and consequently the easily pleased to inquire into this juvenile mystery.

Oh, yes, they *had* seen a ghost! a truly true ghost! They mopped their eyes with their diminutive handkerchiefs and wept in great depression of spirit. It was in the library, they further detailed, just about dark. And it had seen them! It scrabbled and scrunched along the wall! And they both drew up their shoulders to their ears to imitate the shrinking attitude of a ghost who would fain shun observation and get out of the way.

Little Lucille laughed fleeringly, understanding from the motion of their lips what they had said. She gazed around with lustrous, excited eyes; then, she turned toward Baynell, and with infinite élan, she smartly delivered the military salute.

"Why," cried Mrs. Gwynn, on the impulse of the moment, "Lucille says it is Julius Roscoe; that is her sign for him. What is all this foolery, Lucille?"

But just then Uncle Ephraim, in his functions as waiter, overturned the large, massive coffee urn, holding much scalding fluid, upon the table, causing the group to scatter to avoid contact with the turbulent flood. The "widder 'oman" struggled valiantly to keep her temper, [Pg 124] and said only a little of what she thought. The rearrangement of the table, with her awkward and untrained servant, for the service of the meal so occupied her faculties that the matter passed from her mind.

CHAPTER VII [Pg 125]

Miss Mildred Fisher was one of the happiest of women, and this was the result of her own peculiar temperament, although she enjoyed the endowments of a kind fate, for she came of a good family and had a fine fortune in expectation. Her resolute intention was to make the best of everything. With a strong, fresh, buoyant physique and an indomitable spirit it became evident to her in the early stages of this effort that the world is a fairly pleasant planet to live on. Her red hair—a capital defect in those days, when Titian's name was never associated with anything so unfashionable, and which bowed to the earth the soul of many an otherwise deserving damsel—was most skilfully manipulated, and dressed in fleecy billows, usually surmounted with an elaborate comb of carved tortoise-shell, but on special occasions with a cordon of very fine pearls, as if to attract the attention that other flame-haired people avoided by the humblest coiffure. By reason of this management it was described sometimes as auburn, and even golden, but this last was the aberration usually of youths who had lost their own heads, red and otherwise, for Mildred was a bewildering coquette. She had singularly fine hazel eyes, which she used rather less for the purpose of [Pg 126] vision than for the destruction of the peace of man. Her complexion of that delicate fairness so often concomitant of red hair did not present the usual freckles. In fact it was the subject of much solicitous care. She wore so many veils and mufflers that her identity often might well be a matter of doubt as far as her features could be discerned, and Seymour, being a very glib young lieutenant, once facetiously threatened her with arrest for going masked and presumably entertaining designs pernicious to the welfare of the army. That she did entertain such designs, in a different sense, was indeed obvious, for with her determination to make the best of everything, Miss Fisher had resolved to harass the heart of the invader the moment a personable man with a creditable letter of introduction presented himself. For she "received the Yankees," as the phrase went, while others closed their doors and steeled their hearts in bitterness.

"We *all* receive the Yankees," she was wont to say smilingly. "It is a family failing with us. My father and five brothers in the Confederate vanguard are waiting now to receive Yankees —as many Yankees as care to come to Bear-grass Creek."

"Oh, Miss Fisher!" remonstrated the gay young lieutenant, perceiving her drift; "how can you consign me so heartlessly to six red-handed Rebels!"

"Only red-headed as yet, fiery,—*all* of them! They'll be red-handed enough after you and they [Pg 127] come to blows!"

This mimic warfare had a certain zest, and many were the youths among the officers of the garrison who liked to "talk politics" in this vein with "Sister Millie," as she was often designated in jocose allusion to the five fiery-haired brothers. And indeed, as the Fisher family was so numerously represented in the Confederate army, she considered that her

Southern partisanship was thus comprehensively demonstrated, and she felt peculiarly at liberty to make merry with the enemy if the enemy would be merry in turn.

Very merry and good-natured the enemy was pleased to be as far as she was concerned. They wrote home for social credentials. They secured introductions from brother-officers who had the entrée, and especially courted for this purpose were two elderly colonels who had been classmates of her father's at West Point, where he was educated, although he had resigned from the army many years ago. The two had sought and naturally had found a cordial welcome at the home of his wife, sister, and mother. It was natural, too, that they should feel and exert a sort of prudential care of the household, in the midst of inimical soldiers, and although their ancient companion-in-arms was in an adverse force hardly fifty miles away, they regarded this as merely the political aspect of the situation, which did not [Pg 128] diminish their amity and bore no relation to their personal sentiment, as they came and went in his house on the footing of friends of the family. Now and again the incongruity was brought home to them by some audacity of Mildred Fisher's.

"If you should meet papa, Colonel Monette," she said one day as one of these elderly officers was going out to command a scouting expedition—"if you *should* meet papa, don't fail to reintroduce yourself, and give him our prettiest compliments."

The elderly officer was a literal-minded campaigner, and as he put his foot in the stirrup he felt rather dolorously that if ever he did meet Guy Fisher again, it would probably be at point-blank range where one would have to swallow the other's pistol ball.

The war, however, was seldom so seriously regarded at the Fisher mansion, one of the fine modern houses of the town,—brick with heavy limestone facings and much iron grille work, perched up on a double terrace, from which two flights of stone steps descended to the pavement. The more youthful officers contrived to import fruits and hothouse flowers, the fresh books and sheet music of the day, and they stood by the piano and wagged their heads to the march in "Faust," which was all the rage at that time, and sped around nimbly to the vibrations of its waltz, that might have made a pair of spurs dance. She had a very pretty wit [Pg 129] of an exaggerated tenor, and it seemed to whet the phrase of every one who was associated with "The Fair One with the Equivocal Locks," as an imitator of her methods had dubbed her.

No order was so strictly enforced as to touch her mother's and her aunt's household. Their poultry roosted in peace. Their firearms were left by officers conducting searches through citizens' houses and confiscating pistols, guns, and knives.

"*We* are as capable of armed rebellion as ever," she would declare joyously.

Miss Fisher's favorite horse bore her airy weight as jauntily down the street as if no impress had desolated equestrian society. On these occasions she was always accompanied by two or three officers, sometimes more, and there was a fable in circulation that once the cavalcade was so numerous that the guard was turned out at the fort, the sentries mistaking the gayly caparisoned approach for the major general commanding the division and his mounted escort.

She sang in a very high soprano voice and with a considerable degree of culture, but one may be free to say that her rendering of "Il Bacio" and "La Farfalletta" was by no means the triumph of art that it seemed to Seymour, and it was suggested to the mind of several of the elder officers that there ought to be something more arduous for him to do than to languish over the piano in a sentimental daze, fairly hypnotized by the simpler melodies—"Her bright [Pg 130] smile haunts me still" and "Sweet Evangeline."

Serious thoughts were sometimes his portion, and Vertnor Ashley now and again received the benefit of them.

"I heard some news when I was in town to-day—and I don't believe it," Seymour said as he sat on a camp-stool on the grass in front of the colonel's tent.

The so-called "street" of the cavalry encampment lay well to the rear. Hardly a sound emanated therefrom save now and then the echo of a step, the jingling of a spur or sabre, and sometimes voices in drowsy talk—perhaps a snatch of song or the thrumming of a guitar. A sort of luminous hush pervaded the atmosphere of the sunny spring afternoon. The shadows slanted long on the lush blue-grass that, despite the trampling to which it had been subjected, sent a revivifying impetus from its thickly interlaced mat of roots and spread a turf like dark rich velvet. The impulse of bloom was rife throughout nature—in a sort of praise offering for the grace of the spring. Humble untoward sprigs of vegetation, nameless, one would think, unnoticed, must needs wear a tiny corolla or offer a chalice full of dew—so minute, so apart from observation, that their very creation seemed a work of supererogation. The dandelions' rich golden glow was instarred along the roadside, and there was a bunch of wood violets in the roots of the maple near Ashley's head, the branches [Pg 131] of the tree holding far down their dark garnet blossoms with here and there clusters of flat wing-like seed-pods, striped with green and brown. A few paces distant was a tulip-tree, gloriously aflare with red and yellow blooms through all its boughs to the height of eighty feet, and between was swung Ashley's hammock with Ashley luxuriously disposed therein. His eyes were on the infinite roseate ranges of the Great Smoky Mountains in the amethystine distance; the purple Chilhowee darkly loomed closer at hand, and about the

foot-hills was belted the placid cestus of tents, all gleaming white, while the splendid curves of the river, mirroring the sky, vied with the golden west. Nothing could have more picturesquely suggested the warrior in his hours of ease. The consciousness of one's own graces ought to add a zest to their value, especially when vanity is as absolutely harmless as Vertnor Ashley's enjoyment of his own good opinion of himself.

"What news? Why don't you believe it? Grape-vine?" asked Ashley. (Grape-vine was the telegraph of irresponsible rumor.)

"No—no—nothing fresh from the army. I heard a rumor to-day about Miss Fisher—that she is engaged to be married."

"I am not surprised—the contrary would surprise me."

Seymour looked alarmed. "Had you heard it, too?" [Pg 132]

"No; but from what I have seen of 'Sister Millie,' as they call her about here, I should say she is a fine recruiting officer."

There was an interval of silence, while Ashley swung back and forth in the hammock and Seymour sat in a clumped posture on the camp-stool, his hands on his knees, and his gloomy eyes on the square toes of his new boots. At length he resumed:—

"Did you ever hear of a fellow that hails from somewhere near here named Lloyd?"

"Lawrence Lloyd?"

"That's the man," said Seymour.

"I've heard of him. That's the Lloyd place a little down the river,—old brick house, but all torn down now—burned by Gibdon's men; good-sized park, or 'grove,' as they call it. That's the man, is it? Commanded some Rebel cavalry in the Bear-grass Creek skirmish."

"Fought like a bear with a sore head—mad about his house, I suppose."

"If I *knew* that Miss Fisher was engaged to him, I would send her a barrel or two of fine old books that I rescued from Gibdon's men—thought I'd save 'em for the owner. They made a bonfire of the library there."

"Lloyd used 'em up in a raid last fall—Gibdon's fellows. I don't blame 'em. But, say Miss Fisher has not been fair to me if she is engaged to that man." [Pg 133]

"I always thought Miss Fisher was particularly fair—owing to a sun-bonnet, rather than to a just mind."

"You think she would treat me as she has—encourage me to make a fool of myself—if she is engaged to another man?"

"I think she is likelier to be engaged to five than 'another.'"

"You should not say that, Ashley," retorted Seymour, gravely. "It is not appropriate. You should not say that," he urged again.

"Oh, I mean no offence, and certainly no disrespect to the lovely Miss Fisher, who is my heart's delight. But you have heard the five-swain story?"

As Seymour looked an inquiry—

"Five Rebs in camp, all homesick, very blue, on a Sunday morning," began Ashley, graphically; "all sitting on logs, each brooding over his fiancée's ivory-type. And, as misery loves company, one sympathized with another, and, by way of boastfulness, showed the beautiful counterfeit presentment of his lady-love. Their clamors brought up the rest of the five, and *each* had the identical photograph of Miss Millie Fisher. She was engaged to all five! There was nothing else they could do—so they held a prayer-meeting!"

"What bosh!" exclaimed Seymour, fretfully. "People are always at some extravagant story about her like that. It isn't true, of course." [Pg 134]

"It is as much like her as if it were true," Ashley declared laughingly.

The serious, not to say petulant traits of Seymour were intensified by the conscious jeopardy of his happiness, and the continual doubt in his mind as to whether he had any ground for hope at all.

"By George! if I knew she was engaged—or—if I knew—anything at all about anything—I'd cut it all, and give it up. I don't want to be a source of amusement to her—or to be made a show of. Sometimes, I pledge you my word, I feel like a dancing bear."

"Miss Fisher has something of the style of a bear-ward, it must be confessed," said Ashley. "I fancied at one time she had a notion of getting a chain on me—she is enterprising, you know."

Then, after a moment, "Why *don't* you cut it all, Mark?"

"Oh," cried Seymour, with an accent of positive pain, "I can't. Sometimes I believe she *does*

care—she makes me believe it."

"Well," smiled Ashley, banteringly, "you dance very prettily—not a bit clumsily—a very creditable sort of bear."

Another interval of silence ensued.

"I blame Baynell for all this," said Seymour, sullenly.

"Why? Is he a rival?" [Pg 135]

"No. But it was not at all serious—I wasn't so dead gone, I mean—when I wanted him to take me to the Roscoes'. If I had had some other place to visit—some other people to know—some distraction of a reasonable social circle, she couldn't have brought me to such a—a—"

"—state of captivity," suggested Ashley.

"Well, you know, seeing nobody else of one's own sort—and a charming girl—and nothing to do but to watch her sing—and hear her talk—and all the other men wild about her—and—it's—it's—"

"You'll forget it all before long," suggested the consolatory Ashley. "You know we are here to-day and gone to-morrow, in a sense that General Orders make less permanent than Scripture. If the word should come to break camp and march—how little you would be thinking of Miss Fisher."

"I suppose you were never in love, Ashley," Seymour said, a trifle drearily, adding mentally, "except with yourself!"

"I!" exclaimed Ashley, twirling his mustache. "Oh, I have had my sad experiences, too—but I have survived them—and partially forgotten them."

"I have no interest now in going to the Roscoes'. Mrs. Fisher offered to introduce me. She and Miss Millie are going there to-morrow to some sort of a sewing-circle—they just want an [Pg 136] officer's escort through the suburbs, I know. That sewing-circle is a fraud, and ought to be interdicted. They pretend to sew and knit for the hospitals here and Confederate prisoners, and I feel sure they smuggle the lint and clothes and supplies through the lines to Rebels openly in arms. I hate to go."

"Well, now, I'll engage to eat all the homespun cotton shirts that Miss Fisher ever makes for the Rebel in arms, or any other man. You need have no punctilio on that score."

"Oh, it isn't that. I hate to meet Baynell—what is he staying on there for? He is as rugged now as ever in his life. Is he in love with the widow?"

"He has a queer way of showing it if he is." And Ashley detailed the circumstance of the impressing of the horse. Seymour listened with a look of searching, keen intentness.

"Baynell would never have done that in this world," he declared, "if you had not been there to hear the neighing, too. Why, it stands to reason. The family must have known the horse might whinny at any moment. They relied on his winking at it, and he would have done it if you had not been there. He took that pose of being so regardful of the needs of the service because he has been favoring the Roscoes in every way imaginable. Why, hardly anybody else has a stick of timber left, and every day houses are seized for military occupation, and the owners turned adrift, but *I* know that when one of his men stole only a plank from Judge [Pg 137] Roscoe's fence, he had the fellow tied up by his thumbs with the plank on his back for hours in the sun. That was for the sake of *discipline*, my dear fellow—not for Judge Roscoe's plank. On the contrary—quite the reverse!"

Seymour wagged his satiric head, unconvinced, and Ashley remembered afterward that he vaguely wished that Baynell would not make so definite a point about these matters, provoking a sort of comment that ordinary conduct could hardly incur. Baynell ought to be in camp.

CHAPTER VIII [Pg 138]

Baynell, himself, reached the same conclusion the next evening, but by an altogether different process of reasoning.

He had noticed the unusual stir among the "ladies" early in the afternoon and a sort of festival aspect that the old house was taking on. The parlors were opened and a glow of sunshine illumined the windows and showed the grove from a new aspect—the choicer view where the slope was steep. The river rounded the point of woods, and there was a great stretch of cliffs opposite; beyond were woods again, reaching to the foot-hills that clustered about the base of the distant mountains bounding the prospect. The glimpse seen through

the rooms was like a great painting in intense, clear, fine colors, and he paused for a moment to glance at it as he passed down the hall, for all the doors were standing broadly aflare and all the windows were open to the summer-like zephyr that played through the house.

"Oh, Captain Baynell!" cried Adelaide, catching sight of him and gasping in the sheer joy of the anticipation of a great occasion. "The Sewing-Society is going to meet here, and you can come in, too! Mayn't he come in, Cousin Leonora?"

[Pg 139] Mrs. Gwynn was filling a large bowl on a centre-table with a gorgeous cluster of deep red tulips, and Baynell noticed that she had thrust two or three into the dense knot of fair hair at the nape of her neck. As she turned around one of the swaying bells was still visible, giving its note of fervid brilliancy to her face. Her dress was a white mull, of simple make—old, even with a delicate darn on one of its floating open sleeves, but to one familiar with her appearance in the sombre garb of widowhood she seemed radiant in a sort of splendor. What was then called a "Spanish waist," a deeply pointed girdle of black velvet, flecked with tiny red tufts, made the sylphlike grace of her figure more pronounced, and at her throat was a collarette of the same material. Her cheeks were flushed. It had been a busy day—with the morning lessons, with the arrangement of the parlors, the array of materials, the setting of the sewing-machines in order, including two or three of the earlier hand-power contrivances, sent in expressly from the neighbors, the baskets for lint,—one could hear even now the whirring of the grindstone as old Ephraim put a keener edge on the scissors. Last but not least Leonora had accomplished the bedizenment of the "ladies."

Adelaide was not born to blush unseen. She realized the solecism that her vanity lured her to commit, yet she said hardily, "Look at *me*, Captain—I'm got me a magenta sash!"

[Pg 140] "And it's beautiful!" cried Baynell, responsively. "And so are you!"

Mrs. Gwynn glanced down at her reprovingly and was out of countenance for a moment.

"How odious it is to give to colors the names of battles," she said,—"Magenta and Solferino!"

"This is a beautiful color, though," said Baynell.

"But the name gives such an ensanguined suggestion," she objected.

Her eye critically scanned the three "ladies" in their short white mull dresses and magenta sashes, each with a bow of black velvet in her hair, as they led Captain Baynell into the room, and it did not occur to her till too late to canvass the acceptability of the presence of the Yankee officer to the ladies of the vicinity, assembling in this choice symposium, who had some of them the cruel associations of death itself with the very sight of the uniform.

Whether it were good breeding, or the magnanimity that exempts the unit from the responsibility of the multitude, or a realization that Judge Roscoe's guest, be he whom he might, was entitled to the consideration of all in the Roscoe house, there was no demonstration of even the slightest antagonism. The usual civility of salutation in acknowledging the introduction served to withhold from Captain Baynell himself the fact that he could hardly hope to be *persona grata*; and ensconced in an arm-chair at the window [Pg 141] overlooking the lovely landscape, he found a certain amusement and entertainment in watching the zealous industry of the little Roscoe "ladies," who were very competent lint-pickers and boasted some prodigies of performance. A large old linen crumb-cloth, laundered for the occasion, had been spread in the corner between the rear and side windows of the back parlor, so that the flying lint should not bespeck the velvet carpet, or an overturned basket work injury, and here in their three little chairs they sat and competed with each other, appealing to Captain Baynell to time them by his watch.

Now and then their comments, after the manner of their age, were keenly malapropos and occasioned a sense of embarrassment.

"Don't you reckon Ac'obat is homesick by this time, Captain?" demanded Adelaide.

"Look out of the window, Captain—you can see the grating to the wine-cellar where he could put his nose out to take the air," said Geraldine.

"An' he thought the lightning could come in there to take him—kee—kee—" giggled Adelaide.

"Oh, *wasn't* he a foolish horse!" commented Geraldine, regretfully.

"Uncle Ephraim said Ac'obat had no religion else he'd have stayed where he was put like a Christian," Adelaide observed.

"Oh, but he was *just* a horse—poor Ac'obat!"

[Pg 142] At this moment emulation seized Geraldine. "Oh, my—just look how Lucille is double-quickin' about that lint pickin'!"

And a busy silence ensued.

The large rooms were half full of members of the society. In those days the infinite resources of the "ready-made" had not penetrated to these regions, and doubtless the work of such

eager and industrious coteries carried comfort and help farther than one can readily imagine, and the organized aid of woman's needle was an appreciable blessing. Two or three matrons, with that wise, capable look of the able house-sovereign, when scissors, or a dish, or a vial of medicine is in hand, sat with broad "lapboards" across their knees, and cut and cut the coarse garments with the skill of experts, till great piles were lying on the floor, caught up with a stitch to hold component parts together and passed on to the younger ladies at the sewing-machines that whirred and whirred like the droning bees forever at the jessamine blooming about the windows. Nothing could be more unbeautiful or uninviting than the aspect of these stout garments, unless it were to the half-clad soldier in the trenches to whom they came like an embodied benediction. The thought of him—that unknown, unnamed beneficiary, for whose grisly needs they wrought—was often, perhaps, in the mind of each.

"And oh!" cried Adelaide, "while I'm pickin' lint for this hospital, I dust know some little girl away out yonder in the Confederacy is pickin' lint too—an' if my papa was to get wounded, they'd have plenty." [Pg 143]

"Pickin' fast, she is, like us!" cried the hastening Geraldine.

The deft-fingered mute, discerning their meaning by the motion of their lips, redoubled her speed.

Others were sewing by hand, and one very old lady had knitted some lamb's wool socks, which were passed about and greatly admired; she was complacent, almost coquettish, so bland was her smile under these compliments.

And into this scene of placid and almost pious labor came Miss Mildred Fisher presently, leading her "dancing bear."

If there were any question of the acceptability of the enforced presence of a Yankee officer, either in the mind of the Sewing-Circle or Lieutenant Seymour, it was not allowed to smoulder in discomfort, but set ablaze to burn itself out.

"I know you are all just perfectly amazed at our assurance in bringing a Yankee officer here, —*don't* be mortified, Lieutenant Seymour,—but mamma wouldn't hear of coming without a valiant man-at-arms as an escort, so I begged and prayed him to come, and now I want you all to beg and pray him to stay!"

Then she introduced him to several ladies, while Mrs. Fisher, always the mainspring of the executive committee, a keen, thin, birdlike woman, swift of motion and of a graceful presence, but prone to settle moot points with a decisive and not altogether amiable peck, gave him no attention, but darting from group to group devoted herself wholly to the business in hand. She seemed altogether oblivious, too, of Mildred's whims, which were to her an old story. Seldom, indeed, had Mildred Fisher looked more audaciously sparkling. Her fairness was enhanced by the black velvet facing of her white Leghorn turban, encircled with one of those beautiful long white ostrich plumes then so much affected that, after passing around the crown, fell in graceful undulations over the equivocal locks and almost to the shoulder of her black-and-white checked walking suit of "summer silk," trimmed with a narrow black-and-white fringe. [Pg 144]

"Grandma sent these socks and shirts—" she said officiously, taking a bundle from a neat colored maid who had followed her—"and I brought my thimble—here it is—golden gold—and a large brass thimble for Mr. Seymour. You wouldn't think he has so much affinity for brass—to look at him now! I intend to make him sew, too. Mrs. Clinton, I know you think I am just *awful*," turning apologetically upon the very old lady her sweet confiding eyes. "But —oh, Mrs. Warren—before I forget it, I want to let you know that your son was *not* wounded in that Bear-grass Creek skirmish at all. I have a letter from one of my brothers—brother number four—and he says it is a mistake; your son was not hurt, but distinguished himself greatly. Here's the letter. I can't tell you *how* it came through the lines, for Lieutenant Seymour might *repeat* it; he has the l-o-n-g-e-s-t tongue, though you wouldn't think it, to see him now, speechless as he is." [Pg 145]

Lieutenant Seymour rallied sufficiently to protest he couldn't get in a word edgewise, and Mrs. Gwynn, with her official sense of hospitality and a real pity for anything that Millie Fisher had undertaken to torment on whatever score, adopted the tone of the conversation, and said with a smile that he might consider himself "begged and prayed" to remain.

Lieutenant Seymour was instantly placed at ease by this episode, but Mrs. Gwynn experienced a vague disquietude because of the genuine surprise that expressed itself in Mildred Fisher's face as that comprehensive feminine glance of instantaneous appraisement of attire took account of her whole costume. Leonora had not reckoned on this development when, in that sudden revulsion of feeling, she had discarded the fictitious semblance of mourning for the villain who had been the curse of her life. The momentary glance passed as if it had not been, but she could not at once rid herself of a sense of disadvantage. She knew that to others as well the change must seem strange—yet, why should it? All knew that her widow's weeds had been but an empty form—what significance could the fact possess that they were worn for a time as a concession to convention, then laid aside? She could not long lend herself, however, to the absorption of reflection. The present was strenuous. [Pg 146]

Miss Fisher was bent on investing Lieutenant Seymour with the thimble and requiring him to thread a needle for himself, while she soberly and with despatch basted a towel which she destined him to hem. The comedy relief that these arrangements afforded to the serious business of the day was very indulgently regarded, and her bursts of silvery laughter and the young officer's frantic pleas for mercy—utterly futile, as all who knew Millie Fisher foresaw they must be—brought a smile to grave faces and relaxed the tension of the situation, placing the unwelcome presence of the unasked visitor in the category of one of Millie Fisher's many freaks.

Seymour had a very limited sense of humor and could not endure to be made ridiculous, even to gladden so merry a lady-love; but when she declared that she would transfer the whole paraphernalia—thimble, needle, towel, and all—to Captain Baynell, and let him do the hemming, Seymour, all unaware of the secret amusement his sudden consent afforded the company, showed that he preferred that she should make him ludicrous rather than compliment another man by her mirthful ridicule.

"Now, there you go! Hurrah! Make haste! Not such a big stitch! Now, Mr. Seymour, let me tell you, Hercules with the distaff was not a circumstance to you!" [Pg 147]

And the Sewing-Circle could but laugh.

Upstairs in the quiet old attic these evidences of hilarity rose with an intimation of poignant contrast. The dreary entourage of broken furniture and dusty trunks and chests, the silence and loneliness,—no motion but the vague shifting of the motes in the slant of the sun, no sound but the unshared mirth below, in his own home,—this seemed a more remote exile. Julius felt actually further from the ancestral roof than when he lay many miles away in the trenches in the cold spring rains, with never a canopy but the storm, nor a candle but the flash of the lightning. He sat quite still in the great arm-chair that his weight deftly balanced on its three legs, his head bent to a pose of attention, his cap slightly on one side of his long auburn locks, his eyes full of a sort of listening interest, divining even more than he heard. He was young enough, mercurial enough, to yearn wistfully after the fun,—the refined "home-folks fun" of the domestic circle, the family and their friends,—to which he had been so long a stranger; not the riotous dissipation of the wilder phases of army life nor the animal spirits, the "horse-play," of camp comrades. Sometimes at a sudden outburst of laughter, dominated by Millie Fisher's silvery trills of mirth, his own lips would curve in sympathy, albeit this was but the shell of the joke, its zest unimagined, and light would [Pg 148] spring into his clear dark eyes responsive to the sound. Now and again he frowned as he noted men's voices, not his father's nor well-remembered tones of old friends. They had been less frequent than the women's voices, but now they came at closer intervals, with an unfamiliar accent, with a different pitch, and he began to realize that here were the Yankee officers.

"Upon my word, they seem to be having a fine time," he said sarcastically.

In the next acclaim he could distinguish, besides the tones of the invaders and the ringing vibration from Millie Fisher that led every laugh, Leonora's drawling contralto accents, now and again punctuated with a suggestion of mirth, and high above all the callow chirp of the twin "ladies." He lifted his head and looked at the wasps, building their cells on the window lintel, the broad, dreary spaces of the attic; and he beheld, as it were, in contrast, his own expectation, the welcome, the cherished guest, the guarded secret, the open-hearted talks with his father, with the "ladies," with her whom, since widowed, he might call to himself, without derogation to his affection or disrespect to her, his "best beloved." The hardship it was that for the bleak actuality he should have risked his capture, his life,—yes, even his neck! His hand trembled upon the map, wrought out to every detail of his discoveries, that [Pg 149] he kept now in his breast, and now shifted to the sole of his boot, and now slid in the lining of his coat-pocket, always seeking the safest hiding-place,—forever seeking, forever doubting the wisdom of his selection.

But the map—that was something! He had gained this precious knowledge. Only to get away with it, unharmed, unchallenged, unmolested! This was the problem. This was worth coming for.

"I'll give you some more active entertainment before long, my fine squires of dames," he apostrophized the strangers triumphantly. Then he experienced a species of rage that they should be so merry—and he, he must not see Leonora's face, must not touch her hand, must not tell her all he felt; this would have been dear to him even if she had not cared to listen. It would have been like the votive offering at a shrine, like a prayer from out the fulness of the heart.

There was presently the tinkle of glasses and spoons, intimating the serving of refreshments. "I'd like to see old Uncle Ephraim playing butler. He must step about as gingerly as a gobbler on hot tin," Julius said to himself with a smile. "I'll bet a million of dollars he has saved me my share—on a high shelf in the pantry it is right now, in a covered dish; and if Leonora should come across it, she would think the old man was thieving on his own account. Such are the insincerities of circumstantial evidence!"

The genial hubbub in the parlors below was resumed after the decorous service of salad and [Pg 150] sherbet, and became even more animated when Colonel Ashley chanced to call to see

Baynell on a matter affecting their respective commands. He had of course no idea that he would find Baynell engaged with the Sewing-Society, but he met Miss Fisher on her own ground, as it were, and there ensued an encounter of wits, a gay joust, neither being more sincere than the other, nor with any *arrière pensée* of irritable feeling to treat a feint as a threat or to cause a thrust to rankle.

Seymour did not welcome him. The prig, Baynell, as he regarded the captain, was so null, so stiffly inexpressive, that his presence had sunk out of account, and the young lieutenant felt that he could rely to a degree on the quiet kindness of the mature dames at work. They did not laugh at his sewing over much, although they noted with secret amusement that, being of the ambitious temper which cannot endure to be found lacking, he had bent his whole energies to the endeavor, and had sewed, indeed, as well as it was possible for a lieutenant of infantry to do on a first lesson. He had a sort of pride in his performance as he handed it up to Miss Fisher, and she showed it to Ashley with an air of pronounced amaze.

"A well-conducted Rebel," she said at last, solemnly, "grounded in the proper conviction as to the ordinance of secession and the doctrine of States' Rights, would go into strong convulsions if he should have to bathe with that towel in a hospital. That wavering hem is an epitome of all the Yankee crooks, and quirks, and skips, and evasions, and concealments of the straight path that typifies right and justice, and Mason and Dixon's line! Therefore out it comes!" [Pg 151]

As Ashley's joyous laughter rang out with its crisp, genial intonations, the listening exile in the attic again involuntarily smiled in sympathy, albeit the next moment he was frowning in jealous discomfort, with a poignant sense of supersedure. Here, under his own roof-tree—his father's home!

Lieutenant Seymour protested with ardor, and in truth he was aghast at the prospect. He had taken so much pains. He had wrought with his whole soul. He had imagined that he had hemmed so well. Although he had lost all thought of Baynell in his interest in the exercises of the afternoon, now that Ashley was at hand to witness his discomfiture he became resentfully conscious of the presence of the other officer. He was suddenly mindful that he could not appear to distinguished advantage as the butt of a joke, however mirthful and merry, and this pointed the fact that he was not gracing the introduction here which he had earlier sought through Baynell's kind offices, and had been, as he thought, most impertinently refused. He forgot the grounds of the declination and took no heed of the circumstance that they included Ashley's request as well as his own. He did not realize that had it fallen to Ashley's lot to hem the towel and thread the needle and wear the brass thimble in a genuine sewing-circle, his genial gay adaptability would have accorded so well with the humor of the company that the jest itself would have been blunted. Its edge was whetted by Lieutenant Seymour's serious disfavor, the red embarrassment of his countenance, even the stiff lock of hair, at the apex of the back of the skull, that stood out and quivered with his eager insistence, as he rose erect and held on to the towel and looked both angrily and pleadingly at Miss Fisher. [Pg 152]

"I hope you will not be mutinous and disobedient," she said gravely. "I should be sorry to discipline you with the weapons of the society."

She threatened to pierce his fingers with a very sharp needle, and as he hastily withdrew one hand, shifting the towel to the other, she opened a very keen pair of shears; as he evaded this she brought up the needle, enfilading his retreat.

As he stood among a crowd of ladies, insisting that his work should be spared with a vehemence which most of them thought was only a humorous affectation and a part of the fun, he noted that Baynell was laughing too, slightly, languidly. Baynell was standing beside the low, marble mantelpiece, with one elbow upon it, the light from the flaming west full on his trim blond beard and hair, his handsome, distinguished face, the manly grace of the attitude. Seymour resented with an infinite rancor at that moment the contrast with his own flushed, fatigued, tousled, agitated, persistent, querulous personality. He could not have given up to save his life, and yet he could but despise himself for holding on. [Pg 153]

"You had better stop pushing me to the wall," he said, and this was literal, for he gave back step by step at each feint of the needle; "you had better be looking out for Captain Baynell. He might have an attack of conscience at any moment, and have all the fruits of your industry seized and confiscated as contraband of war. You must remember he had Mrs. Gwynn's horse impressed."

Baynell was rigid with an intense displeasure. Twice he was about to speak—twice, mindful of the presence of ladies, he hesitated. Then he said, quite casually, though visibly with a heedful self-control:—

"That was because of an order, calling for all citizens' horses in this district for cavalry."

"With which *you* had as much to do as last year's snow. Just see, Miss Fisher,"—Seymour waved his hand toward the piles of clothing,—"'all the coats and garments that Dorcas made'; for Captain Baynell might report that they are intended to give aid and comfort to the enemy!—to be smuggled out of the lines! He has a dangerous conscience!" [Pg 154]

There was a sudden agitated flutter in the coterie. The beautiful aged countenance of Mrs.

Clinton was overcast with a sort of tremor of fright. A sense of discovery, as of a moral paralysis, pervaded the atmosphere. A long significant pause ensued. Then with the intimations of a stanch reserve of resolution,—a sort of "die in the last ditch" spirit,—those more efficient members of the association, middle-aged, competent, experienced matrons, recovered their dignified equanimity and went on with the examining and counting of the results of the day's work and the contributions from without,—Mrs. Fisher, the acting secretary, receiving the reports of the conferring squads and jotting the enumeration down during the sorting and folding of the completed product.

Baynell, apparently losing self-control, had started angrily forward. Ashley, grave, perturbed, had changed color—even he was at a loss. One might not say what a moment so charged with angry potentialities might bring forth. But nothing, no collocation of invented circumstances seemed capable of baffling Miss Fisher. She was equal to any emergency. She had snatched the towel from the lieutenant's hand, and, flying to meet Baynell, her smiling face incongruous with a serious, steady light in her eyes, she stopped him midway [Pg 155] the room.

"Now do me the favor to look at that," she cried gayly, presenting the hem for inspection; "wouldn't you despise an enemy who could take aid and comfort from such a hem as that?"

"A good soldier should never despise the enemy," replied Baynell, seeking to adopt her mood and repeating the truism with an air of banter.

"Well, then, to fit the phrase to your precision, such an enemy would deserve to be despised! What—going—Mrs. Clinton? It *is* getting late."

It was not the usual hour of their separation, but to a very old woman the turmoils of war were overwhelming. As long as the idea of conflict was expressed in the satisfaction of being able to aid in her little way the needy with the work of her own hands,—to knit as she sat by her desolate fireside and wrought for the unknown comrades of her dead sons; to join friends in furnishing blankets and making stout clothes for the soldiers; to bottle her famous blackberry cordial, and to pick lint for the hospitals,—it seemed to have some gentle phase, to bear a human heart. But when the heady tumult, the secret inquisitions, the bitter rancors, the cruelty of bloodshed, and the savagery of death that constitute the incorporate entity of the great monster, War, were reasserted with menace, her gentle, wrinkled hands [Pg 156] fell, her hope fled. The grave was kind in those days to the aged.

Ashley had contrived to give Seymour a glance so significant that he heeded its meaning, though he was already repentant and cowed by the fear of Miss Fisher's displeasure. His heart beat fast as she turned her face all rippling with smiles toward him, albeit he told himself in the same breath that she would have smiled exactly so sweetly had she been as angry as he deserved. For Miss Fisher was not in the business of philanthropy. She had no call to play missionary to any petulant young man's rôle of heathen.

"Are you going to take mamma and me home?" she asked, "or are you going to leave us to be eaten up by the cows homeward bound?"

Now and again might be heard the fitful clanking of a bell as the cows, wending their way along the river bank, paused to graze and once more took up their leisurely progress toward the town. The sunlight was reddening through the rooms. It had painted on the walls arabesques of the lace curtains of the western windows; the glow touched with a sort of revivifying effect the family portraits. Groups of the members of the society having resumed their bonnets and swaying crape veils were going from one to another and commenting on the likeness to the subject and the resemblance to other members of the family, and one or two of artistic bent discussed the relative merits of the artists, for several canvases were [Pg 157] painted by eminent brushes. All were going home, though in the grove the mocking-birds were singing with might and main, but there indeed in the moonlight they would sing the night through with a romantic jubilance impossible to describe.

Ashley, with the ready tact and good breeding which caused him so much to be admired, and so much to admire himself, passed by the more attractive of the younger members of the Circle, and did not even heed the half-veiled challenge of Miss Fisher to join her party homeward, for she had become exceedingly exasperated with Lieutenant Seymour, and had Colonel Ashley been attainable, she would have made the younger man rabid with jealousy on the walk to the town.

But no! He offered his services as escort to Mrs. Clinton, who looked suspiciously and helplessly at him like some tender old baby.

"There is no necessity, but I thank you very much," she said; "I came alone."

The engaging Ashley would not be denied. He had noticed, he said, that to-day some droves of mules were being driven into town, and the heedless soldiers raced along perfectly regardless of what was in the roads before them. They should have some order taken with them, really.

"Oh, *don't* report them," said the old lady. "The—the discipline of the army is so—so *painful*."

"But there are no painless methods yet discovered of making men obey," said Ashley, [Pg 158] laughing.

She still looked at him, doubtfully, as a mouse might contemplate the graces of a very suave cat. But when Julius gazed out from the garret window at the departing group, he was duly impressed with the handsome colonel of cavalry conducting the aged lady on one arm and bearing her delicate little extra shawl on the other, while Mrs. Fisher with Mildred and her "dancing bear," who had taken some clumsy steps that day, made off toward Roanoke City, and the other ladies variously dispersed, Captain Baynell attending the party only to the end of the drive.

Ashley's graceful persistence was justified by the meeting of some of the reckless muleteers in full run down the road, with furious cries and snapping whips and turbulent clatter of animals and men. As his tremulous charge shrunk back aghast, he simply lifted his sword "like a wand of authority," as she always described it, and the noisy rout was turned aside, as if by magic, into a byway, leaving the whole stretch of the turnpike for the passage of the gallant cavalier and one aged lady.

When Baynell came back through the grove and into the house, the parlor doors still stood open. The western radiance was yet red on the walls, albeit the moon was in the sky. The crumb-cloth that had protected the carpet from lint was gone, the sewing-machines had [Pg 159] vanished, all traces of the work were removed, and wonted order was restored among chairs and tables. The rear apartment was as he had seen it hitherto, save that the windows on the western balcony were open, and Mrs. Gwynn, in her white dress, was standing at the vanishing point of the perspective, glimpsed through the swaying curtains and a delicate climbing vine. He hardly hesitated, but passed through the rooms and stepped out, meeting her surprised eyes as she leaned one hand on the iron railing of the balcony.

"I want to speak to you," he said. "I want to know if you think I should have made it plain to those ladies this afternoon that they need fear no interference from me?"

"Oh, I think they understood," she said listlessly, as if it was no great matter.

Her eyes were fixed on the purple western hills. The last vermilion segment of the great solar sphere was slipping beyond them, the sunset gun boomed from the fort, and the flag fluttered down the staff.

"I felt very keenly the position in which I was placed."

She merely glanced at him and then gazed at the outline of the fort against the red sky, all flecked and barred with dazzling flakes of amber. The rampart remained massive and heavy, but the sentry-boxes, giving their queer little castellated effect, were growing indistinct in the distance.

"I was tempted to express my resentment, but I was afraid of going too far—of getting into a [Pg 160] wrangle with that fellow—"

"Oh, *that* would have been unpardonable; in the presence of Mrs. Clinton and the rest of the Circle!" she said definitely.

"I am *so* glad you approve my course," he rejoined with an air of relief.

Once more she looked at him as he stood beside her. A white jessamine clambered up the stone pillar at the outer corner of the grille work. Its blossoms wavered about her; a hummingbird flickered in and out and was still for a moment, the light showing the jewelled effect of the emblazonment of red and gold and green of his minute plumage, then was distinguishable only as a gauzy suggestion of wings. The moon was in her face, ethereal, delicate, seeming to him entrancingly beautiful. He stipulated to himself that it was not this that swayed him. He loved her beauty, but only because it was hers. He did not love her for her beauty. They were close distinctions, but they made an appreciable difference to him. She did not hold his conscience. She did not dictate his sense of right. This was apart from her, a sanction too sacred for any woman, any human soul to control. Yet he sighed with relief to feel the coincidence of his thought and hers.

"You know, about your horse—it was a matter of conscience with me—a sense of duty—a [Pg 161] matter of conformity to my oath as a soldier and my knowledge of the needs of the service. I would not for any consideration evade or fail to forward in letter and spirit any detail even of a special order that merely chanced to come to my notice, and with which I was not otherwise concerned. Not for your sake—not even to win your approval, precious as that must always be to me, nor to avoid your displeasure, and I believe that is the strongest coercion that could be exerted upon me. But the destination of the work done by the Sewing-Circle—that is different. I have no information that it is other than is claimed. I am not bound to nourish suspicions, nor to investigate mysteries, nor to take action on details of circumstantial evidence."

He paused. There was something in her face that he did not understand;—something stunned, blankly silent, and inexpressive. He went on eagerly, the enforced repression of the afternoon finding outlet in a flood of words.

"Lieutenant Seymour understands my position thoroughly well, as Colonel Ashley does. They take a different view—their construction of their duty is more lenient. I don't know why—perhaps because they are volunteers, and the whole war to them is a temporary occupation. But orders are to be obeyed else they would not be issued. If any exceptions were intended,

a permit would be granted."

He paused again, looking straight at her with such confident, lucid, trusting eyes,—and she felt that she must say something to divert their gaze. [Pg 162]

"Exceptions, such as Miss Fisher's favorite mount, Madcap? How pretty Mildred was to-day! Really beautiful; don't you think so?"

"No." His expression was so tender, so wistful, yet so confident, that, amazed, embarrassed, she felt her color begin to flame in her cheeks. "How could she seem beautiful where you are,—the loveliest woman in all the world and the best beloved."

"Captain Baynell!" she exclaimed, hardly believing that she heard him aright. "I do not understand the manner in which you have seen fit to speak to me this evening." She paused abruptly, for he was looking at her with a palpable surprise.

"You must know—you must have seen—that I love you!" he said hastily. "Almost from the moment that I first saw you I have loved you—but more and more, hour by hour, and day by day, as I have learned to know you, to appreciate you—so perfect and so peerless!"

"You surprise me beyond measure. I must beg—I insist that you do not continue to speak to me in this strain."

"Do you mean to say that you did not know it—that you did not perceive it?"

"I did not dream it for one moment," she replied. [Pg 163]

It seemed as if he could not accept her meaning. He pondered on the words as if they might develop some difference.

"You afflict me beyond expression!" he exclaimed with a sort of desperate breathlessness. "You destroy my dearest hopes. How could you fail—how could I fancy! I—I would not suggest the subject as long as your mourning attire repelled it, but—but—since—since—I—I thought you knew all my heart and I might speak!"

"You thought I laid aside a widow's weeds to challenge your avowal!" exclaimed Mrs. Gwynn, in her icy, curt, soft tones.

"Oh, Leonora—for God's sake—put on it no interpretation except that I love you—I adore you; and I thought such hearty, whole-souled affection must awaken some interest, some response. I could hardly be silent except I so feared precipitancy. I spoke as soon as I might without rank offence."

Even then, in the presence of an agitation, a humiliation peculiarly keen to a man of his type, he was not first in Mrs. Gwynn's thoughts. She was reviewing the day and wondering if this connection between the lack of the widow's weeds and the presence of the Yankee officer was suggested to any of the sewing contingent. A vague gesture, a pause, a remembered facial expression, sudden, involuntary, at the sight of him and her,—all had a new interpretation in the sequence of this disclosure. They had thought it the equivalent of the acceptance of a new suitor, and the supposed favored lover had thought so himself! [Pg 164]

The recollection of her woful married life, with its train of barbarities, and rancors, and terrors, both grotesque and horrible, that still tortured her present—the leisure moments of her laborious days—was bitterly brought to mind for a moment. That she, of all the women in the world—that *she* should be contemplating matrimony anew! She gave a light laugh that had in it so little mirth, was so little apposite to ridicule, that he did not feel it a fleer.

"You did not mean it, then?"

"Not for one moment."

"You did not have me in mind?"

"No—no—never at all!"

"Leonora—Mrs. Gwynn—this is like death to me—I—I—"

"I am very sorry—"

"I do not reproach you," he interrupted. "It is my own folly, my own fault! But I have lived on this hope; it is all the life I have. You do not withdraw it utterly? May I not think that in time —"

"No—no—I have no intention of ever marrying again. I—I—was not—not—happy."

"But I am different—" he hesitated. He could not exactly find words to protest his conviction of his superiority to her husband, a man she had loved once. "I mean—we are congenial. I am very considerably older; I am nearly thirty-one. My views in life are fixed, definite; my occupation is settled. Might not—" [Pg 165]

"I am sorry, Captain Baynell; I would not willingly add to the unhappiness, real or imaginary, of any one—but all this is worse than useless. I must ask you not to recur to the subject. And now I must leave you, for the 'ladies' are going to bed, and I must hear them say their

prayers."

He seemed about to detain her with further protestations, then desisted, evidently with a hopeless realization of futility.

"Ask them to remember me in their petitions," he only said with a dreary sort of smile.

He had always seemed to love the "ladies" fraternally, with lenient admiration, and she liked this tender little domestic trait in the midst of his unyielding gravity and inexorable stiffness. She hesitated in the moonlight with some stir of genuine sympathy, and held out her hand as she passed. He caught it and covered it with kisses. She drew it hastily from him, and Baynell was left alone on the balcony; the scene before him, the vernal glamours of the moon, the umbrageous trees, the sweet spring flowers, the sheen of the river, the bivouacs [Pg 166] of the hills, the fort on the height,—these things seemed unrealities and mere shadows as he faced the fragments of that nullity, his broken dream, the only positive actuality in all his life.

CHAPTER IX [Pg 167]

That night, so long his step went to and fro in his room as he paced the floor, for he could not sleep and he could not be still, that the Rebel, hidden in the attic, was visited by grave monitions concerning his neighbor and did not venture out to roam the stairways and halls and the unoccupied precincts of the ground floor as he was wont to do.

"'The son of Belial' has something on his mind, to a certainty, and I hope to the powers 'tisn't me," Julius said now and again, as he listened. He had sat long in his rickety arm-chair in the broad slant of the moonlight, that fell athwart the dim furniture and the gray shadows, for the night continued fair and the moon was specially brilliant. Once in the clear glow he saw distinctly in the further spaces the figure of a man, watchful-eyed, eager, springing toward him as he moved, and he experienced the cold chill of despair before he realized that it was his own reflection in a dull mirror at the opposite side of the great room that had elicited this apparition of terror. He took himself quickly out of the range of its reflection.

"Two Johnny Rebs are a crowd in this garret! I have just about room enough for myself. I'm [Pg 168] not recruiting."

He crept silently to the bed and lay down at full length, all dressed and booted as he was, his hands clasped under his head, with the moonlight in his eyes and illuminating his sleepless pillow, still listening to the regular step marching to and fro in the room below.

Julius did not court slumber.

"I must keep the watch with you, my fine fellow," he said resolutely.

Though there was a strong coercion to wakefulness in the propinquity of that spirit of unrest which possessed his enemy so close at hand, his eyes once grew heavy-lidded and opened with a sudden start as, half dreaming, he fancied a stealthy approach. He sprang from the recumbent posture, and the floor creaked under the abrupt movement. This gave him pause, and he slowly collected his faculties. Surely the stranger would hardly venture, even under the relentless scourge of his own wakeful thoughts, to roam about the house in search of peace or the surcease of mental tyranny that change might effect. This might savor of disrespect to his host, yet Julius canvassed the suggestion. These were untoward times, and strange people were queerly mannered. The officer must have learned in the length of his residence here that the great vacant attic was untenanted wholly, and of course he knew that the ground floor was altogether unoccupied by night. He might descend and light the [Pg 169] library lamp and read. He might indeed roam the deserted rooms with the same sort of satisfaction that Julius himself had already felt in the great spaces, the absolute quiet, the still moonlight, the long abeyance of day with its procrastination of the sordid problems and the toilsome business of life. If he had chanced to meet the Rebel on the stairs, he would scarcely have thought the apparition a spectral manifestation, as the poor little twins had construed the encounter in the library, for old Janus, trembling and terrified, had detailed the significance of the scene in the dining room afterward, and the eagerness of Julius to get away, to be off, had been redoubled. Daily he had hoped for news of the approach of the picket-lines, and daily the old servant wrung his hands and made his report, of which the burden was, "Wuss an' wuss!"—or detailed a "scrimmage" in which "dem scand'lous Rebs had run like tuckies, an' deir line is furder off dan it eber was afore!"

The Confederate officer, nevertheless, had hitherto felt a degree of safety in the attic and had the resources of a manly patience to await the event. This nocturnal eccentricity on the part of the guest of the house, however, roused new forebodings. It bore in its own conditions the inception of added danger. It was unprecedented. It marked a turbulent restlessness and the element of change. In the evidently agitated state of the stranger's [Pg 170]

nerves, some trifle, the scamper of a rat, the dislodgment of the rickety old cornice of this bedstead, the fall of one of the girandoles, teetering over there on a chest of drawers, might rouse him with its clamor and justify the ascent of the attic stairs to investigate its source. These were troublous times. There were stories forever afloat of lawless marauders. Smoke-houses were broken into and pillaged. Mansions were robbed and fired, and their tenants, chiefly women and children, fleeing into the cornfields to hide, watched the roof-tree flare. It was hard for the authorities to find and fix the responsibility for these dread deeds in remote inaccessible spots, and it would be culpable neglect for this Federal officer to tolerate the suggestion of an ill-omened noise or an unaccustomed presence without seeking out its cause. Evidently any accident would bring him upstairs. It was equally obvious that the garret was no place to sleep to-night! Julius, as he lay on the pillow, could hardly rid himself of the idea of approach. Ever and anon he looked for the stealthy shadow of which he had dreamed, climbing in the moonbeams along the balusters of the stairway. Finally he stole silently out of the reach of the moonlight to a darker corner of the room,—the deep recess of one of the windows which the shadow of a great branch of the white pine made duskier still. The tall tree, with its full, sempervirent boughs, showed the varying nocturnal tints that [Pg 171]
color may compass, uninformed by the sun,—the cool suggestion of a fair dull green where the moonbeams glistered, the fibrous leaves tipped with a dim sparkle; the deep umbrageous verdure where the darkness lurked and yet did not annul the vestige of tone. As he reclined on the window-seat, he discerned farther down a faint flare of artificial light. It described a regularly barred square amidst the pine needles, and he presently recognized it as the light from the window of Captain Baynell's room. Now and again it flickered in a way that told how the disregarded candle was beginning to gutter in the socket. Still to and fro the regular footfalls went, muffled on the heavy carpet, but in the dead hush of night perceptible enough to the watching listener. At last with a final flare the taper burned out, but the moon was in the windows along the western side of the house, and still to and fro went the steps, betokening the turmoil of unquiet thoughts. Julius watched how the moonbeams shifted from bough to bough as the slow night lingered. He heard the bells from the city towers mark the hour and the recurrent echo from the rocky banks of the river: then one far away, belated, faint, scarcely perceived, beat out the tally of the time on some remote cliff. Once more the air fell silent save for the jubilee of the mocking-birds, for spring had come, and skies were fair, and the gossamer moon was a-swing in the night, and love, and life, and home were dear, and the incredibly sweet, brilliant delight of song arose in [Pg 172]
pæans of joy and faith. Even this waned after a time. A wind with the thrills of dawn in its wings sprang up, and Julius shivered with the chill. The dew was cold and thick in the pines, and the sward glittered like a sheet of water.

At last all was quiet and silent in the room below. Julius listened intently. No creak of opening door; no footfall on the stair. Now, he told himself, was the moment of danger, when he could no longer be assured of the man's movements, and could not even guess at his intentions. He listened—still—still to silence. Silence absolute, null.

A bird stirred with a half-awakened chirp. The sky showed a clearer tone, a vague blue, growing ever more definite. In the stillness, with an elastic, leaping sound, strong and sweet, the call of a bugle rang out suddenly from the fort on the heights, and, behold, with a flash of red on the water, and a flare of gold in the sky, the sweet spring day was early here.

It came glowing on with all the graces and soft splendors of the season as if it bore, too, none of the prosaic recall to the labors and sordid routine and unavailing troubles and vexations of the workaday world. The camps were alive, the drums were beating, and all the echoes of the hills gave voice to martial summons. The flag was floating anew from the heights of the fort in the fresh and fragrant sunshine, and now and again a bar or two of the [Pg 173]
music of a military band in the distance came on the wind. The clatter of wagon wheels was audible from the stony streets of the little city. The shriek of a locomotive split the air as an incoming train whizzed across the bridge. The river craft steamed and puffed, and blockaded the landing, now backing water and now forging forward, remonstrating with bells and whistles in strenuous dialogue.

It was a day like yesterday, yet to Baynell all the world had changed. No day could ever be the same. Life itself was made up of depreciated values. The blow had fallen so heavily, so suddenly, so conclusively. All, all was dead! It was much with a sense of decorous observance, of reverential respect, that he made haste to bury his slain hopes, his foolish dream, his ardent expectations out of sight, never to rise again. It was unwise to linger here, but not because of his own interest, he said to himself. It would not unfit him for his duty. This was all that was left to him. His feeling for this had never swerved. It was unaffected—all apart from what had come and gone. But his presence could but be distasteful to her. And any moment might reveal his state of feeling to others—to Judge Roscoe, who would resent it if it should suggest an unwelcome urgency. And the neighbors—he had not been unnoting of the glances of surprise that had already greeted that radiant figure in white and [Pg 174]
red yesterday. While he winced a little from the realization that his sudden departure would illustrate the sad plight of a love-lorn suitor, disregarded and cast aside,—for he had a thousand keen susceptibilities to pride,—and he would fain the tongues of gossips should forbear this sacred theme, it were best that he should go, and that shortly.

When he appeared at the breakfast-table, pale and a trifle haggard, he gave no other token of his long vigil and the radical change that he had suffered in his life and prospects. He was

a man of theory. He valued his self-respect. He insisted on his self-control. He had exerted all his capacities, summoned all the resources of his courage; and this was the more needed because of the unconventional, informal footing on which he stood with the family. To say farewell and ride away might seem easy enough, but this was like quitting a home with affectionate domestic claims. When he said that he thought he must return to camp to-day, the twin "ladies" laid down knife and fork to enter their protest. They lifted their voices in plaintive entreaty, and the deaf-mute looked at Baynell with limpid eyes and a quivering lip. But Uncle Ephraim, bringing in the waffles, had a vague suggestion of "It's time, too," in the wag of his head. Judge Roscoe doubtless experienced a vivid realization of the advantage to accrue to the young soldier in the attic, whose security in his hiding-place was so [Pg 175] endangered by the presence of the Federal officer, for he was very guarded even in his first cordial phrases, and thenceforward said no more than policy required. The twin "ladies," however, continued to loudly urge that the captain might find lizards in his cot; and asked if his tent had a floor; and warned him that frogs were everywhere now. "Tree-toads, o-o-oh! with injer-rubber feet," cried Geraldine, shudderingly, "that blow out and climb!"

"And you'll have *no* little girl to put a lump of sugar in your after-dinner coffee, Captain," said Adelaide, impressing the merits of her methods.

"And no little girl to bring you a lighted taper for your cigar," chimed in Geraldine.

"It's *my* turn to-day, Ger'ldine," cried the enterprising Adelaide, springing from her chair to monopolize the precious privilege.

"No—no! mine—*mine*! You had it yesterday!" cried Geraldine, racing after her out of the room.

"'Twas day before!" protested Adelaide's voice far up the hallway.

"You had better get your cigar-case ready, to bestow the boon on the first comer," suggested Mrs. Gwynn. She had entirely recovered her equanimity, as he perceived. The state of his unsought affections was naught to her. The wreck of his heart—she had known wrecked hearts for a more bitter cause! Doubtless she thought the pain transitory in his case; already [Pg 176] its contemplation seemed to have passed from her mind like a tale that is told. She was sedately suave as always, barely attentive, preoccupied, her usual manner, so incongruous with her youth and beauty, so at variance with her attire from the old wardrobe of by-gone days,—the fresh white lawn, flecked with light blue, the ruffles finished with "footing," and with a bobinet scarf about her throat, wherein was thrust a pin of a single rose carved in coral. She was like some dainty maiden, no refugee from the world, sad and widowed.

She led the way to the library, partly to see that the "ladies" did not set themselves aflame as their short skirts flickered about the small dully burning fire, still lighted night and morning against the chill of the crisp vernal air. They were, indeed, leaping back and forth over the fender with some temerity, and Baynell, seating himself by the table, his cigar between his teeth, thought it best to dispose of both the lighted spills by not drawing at all till both were alternately offered and the extinction of each secured. Then, as the "ladies" flew back to the dining room and out to the parterre, having volunteered to gather the rest of the flowers for the vases, Leonora and Baynell were left for the time together.

It gratified him to perceive that she did not fear the introduction of the subject anew. She experienced not even a momentary embarrassment. She understood him so well, and the [Pg 177] plane of his emotion.

The early morning sunshine was in the cheerful library windows; a mocking-bird on a vine outside swayed so close, as he sang, that his shadow continually flickered over the sill; the flowers were all freshly abloom, and Mrs. Gwynn was standing on the opposite side of the table, her hands full of the spring blossoms that lay already on a tray, preparing to fill the great blue and white Wedgwood bowl.

Baynell, commenting on the splendor of the tulips as he smoked his cigar, spoke of the craze for speculation in the bulb that had existed in Holland, and said he had once seen an old book of illustrations of famous prize-takers, with fabulous prices; he had always wondered how they compared with the results of modern culture and the infinite variety to which the bloom had been brought, and he had often wished to see the book again.

"Why, we have that!" exclaimed Mrs. Gwynn, pausing with her hands full of the gold variety "flamed" with scarlet. She glanced uncertainly toward the bookshelves, then suddenly remembering—"Oh, I know now where it is;—in the old bookcase upstairs, at the head of the third flight. I will call one of the ladies to go for it."

Baynell rose, his lighted cigar between his lips. "Don't trouble them; let me go!"

Julius heard the swift step of a young man on the stair. He knew that the crucial moment [Pg 178] had come. And yet for the sake of the safety of his father, who had concealed him here, he dared not defend himself with his pistols. He had not a moment for flight or to seek a hiding-place. He could only nerve his powers to meet the crisis as best he might.

Baynell, taken wholly by surprise, felt his senses reel when, like the grotesque inconsequence of a dream, a man in the uniform of a Confederate officer in the quiet, peaceful house confronted him at the head of the flight.

"You are my prisoner!" Baynell mechanically gasped, clutching Julius with one hand and drawing his pistol with the other. "You are my prisoner!"

"In a horn!" retorted Julius, delivering his enemy a blow between the eyes which flung Baynell, stunned and bleeding, down the flight to the landing, while the boy went by him like a flash.

That swift fiery figure, with its gray regimentals and its brass and steel glitter, covered with blood, passed Leonora like some gory apparition as she stood in the library door, amazed, pallid, breathless, summoned by the sound of loud voices and the reverberating clamors of the collision on the stairs. Julius dashed through the drawing-rooms, opened the window on the western balcony, sprang over the rail, and disappeared swiftly among the low boughs of [Pg 179] the row of evergreen shrubs planted there in old times as a wind-break, and stretching along the crest of the hill.

And placidly in the sunshine the sentry paced his beat before the south portico, the reaches of the drive in sight, the appropriate entrance of the place, all unconscious of aught amiss, seeing nothing, hearing nothing,—till suddenly, with an effect of confusion, like the distortions of a delirium, he was aware that the grove was full of Federal soldiers, chiefly from the infantry regiment camped in the orchard to the west,—soldiers in wild disorder, hatless, shoeless, coatless, many of them,—all armed, all howling with an unexplained excitement, racing frantically hither and thither, bushwhacking with their rifles every bough in their reach. And now they came at full run, still howling and wild, toward the house.

"Halt!" cried the sentry. "Halt!"

The advance came surging on, regardless.

"Halt, or I fire!" once more the guard warned the onset. And he levelled his weapon.

They clamored out words at him, all madly intermingled, all unintelligible, approaching still at full run.

Perhaps the sentinel had some excusable regard for his own safety, for in the unexplained excitement that possessed them, they were less soldiery than a frantic mob. He had warrant enough to fire into the midst of the crowd. But it seemed that he might in a moment have [Pg 180] been torn limb from limb. He interpreted his duty on the side of caution. He cocked his weapon, fired into the air, and called lustily upon the "Corporal of the guard." The mass surged into the house, some by the front door, some by the open library window, others scaled the balcony and pressed through the drawing-rooms and into the hall.

The terrified children clung to the skirt of Mrs. Gwynn's dress, as amazed and bewildered she stood in the wide long hall, by the great carved newel of the stairs, while with frantic interrogatories—"Where is he? Where is he? Who is he?"—the intruders searched every nook and cranny of the lower floor. Destruction, the inadvertent incident of haste, or the concomitant of clumsy accoutrements, seemed to attend their steps. Now sounded the shiver of glass as a soldier burst through one of the long French windows of the dining room. A trooper caught his huge cavalry spurs in the meshes of a lace curtain in one of the parlors and brought down cornice, lambrequin, and all with a crash. The crystal shades of the hall chandelier were not proof against a bayonet, held unduly aloft at the posture of Shoulder Arms. A tussle for precedence knocked a weighty marble statue, half life-size, out of the niche at the turn of the staircase. These casualties and the attendant noise, the heavy tramp of booted feet, the raucous sonority of their voices as they called suggestions to each [Pg 181] other, all intensified the terror, the tumult of their uncontrolled and turbulent presence.

As a score raced up the stairs a sudden hush fell upon the rout. Those still below apprehended developments of moment and pressed to the scene. The foremost had encountered Judge Roscoe and old Ephraim bearing down to the second story the prostrate body of Captain Baynell, all dripping with blood, while the floor of the stairs to the attic showed the stains of the fall.

The unexpected spectacle stayed the tumult for a moment. Then as a hoarse murmur rose, Judge Roscoe turned toward the foremost standing at the foot of the attic flight.

"Lend a hand here," he said with a calm, steady voice. Then, looking over the balustrade to those below, "Has the surgeon come?"

The question went from one to another—"Has the surgeon come?" to those that filled the halls and made sudden excursions to and fro in the adjoining rooms as suspicion of hiding-places occurred to them; to others that gorged the main staircase, packed close at its head, with necks craning forward, and ears and eyes intent to hear and see what had chanced.

By this time officers were in the house and the unwelcome voice of command curtailed the activities of the mob and reduced it speedily to the aspect of soldiery. The voice of command had irate intonations, and one or two of the younger officers showed a disposition to lay [Pg 182] about with the flat of their swords, as a "wand of authority" indeed, but, apparently inadvertently, dealing blows that had tingling intimations. They cleared the mansion quickly, the unruly manifestation serving to minimize its provocation.

To Judge Roscoe's infinite relief the officers were disposed to regard the disturbance as one

of those inexplicable attacks of folly which sometimes lay hold on a mass of men, but which would be incapable of affecting them as individuals. For a search-party organized on a strict military principle had carefully ransacked every portion of the house and cellar and also the attic,—where no traces betrayed recent habitation,—examined all the vineyard, hedges, shrubbery, and even the boughs of the great trees, and invaded the stable, barn, crib, ice-house, poultry yards, dairy, kennel, dove-cote, the miscellaneous outbuildings, sties and byres, all empty, devoid even of the usual domestic animals—absolutely with no result. No Confederate fugitive, covered with blood or in any other plight, was found, and in the thrice-guarded camps that surrounded the place escape seemed impossible. The ranking officer who ordered the search naturally believed that the sudden conviction of the presence of a Confederate soldier in the house was a sheer delusion, promulgated and distorted by rumor. Some story of Captain Baynell's fall and wound, caught possibly from the messenger sent to [Pg 183] fetch the surgeon, had been misunderstood. This he considered was the only reasonable explanation. No one, he argued, could have escaped under the circumstances. No Rebel was in the house or in the grounds. It was impossible for a man to have fled except into the midst of the camps.

Notwithstanding the conviction thus reached, special precautionary measures were taken. New sentries were stationed on the rear and west of the house as well as in front. These posts were to be visited by a sergeant with a patrol, twice during the night. If any Rebel had contrived to escape from the place, he would find it difficult indeed to reënter it. These duties concluded, the officer dismissed the whole matter as a canard or one of the inexplicable manifestations of human folly, and departed, leaving quiet descending upon the distracted scene.

It was the cook, Aunt Chaney, who had been sent at full speed for the surgeon. She had vaguely understood from old Ephraim's aspect and frantic mandate that something terrifying had befallen the household, and she did not realize until afterward the sacrifice of dignity her aspect must have presented as she ran, fatly waddling, over the hill, across the commons, and then up a path to a hospital on an eminence overlooking the town, formerly a Medical College. She was bonnetless, limping actively, for one of her large, loose slippers had gone, and gone forever. Its loss destroyed the equipoise of her gait; her unshod foot was [Pg 184] pierced with stones and chilled with the damp ground; her sleeves were rolled up, her arms held out at a bandy angle, for her fingers were dripping with cake-batter, and she did not have sufficient composure to wring them free till she was following the surgeon home.

The condition of the messenger intimated the seriousness of the call, and the surgeon hardly waited to hear more than the wild appeal—"Come at once! Captain Baynell has killed his-self —Heabenly Friend! I wish he could hev' tuk enny other premises ter hev' c'mitted the deed." As she toiled along behind the surgeon, "Oh, my Lawd an' King!" she panted at intervals.

Baynell remained unconscious for some time. When at length he came to himself he was lying quietly in the great, commodious bedroom that he had of late occupied in the storm centre, the green Venetian blinds half closed, the afternoon sunlight softly flecking the carpet, the air of high decorum and gentle nurture which so characterized the place peculiarly in evidence, and old Ephraim noiselessly flitting about with a palm-leaf fan in his hand, ready to annihilate any vagrant fly with enough temerity to appear.

"Ye los' yer balance, sah, an' fell down de steers," he unctuously explained.

"I know—I remember that—but who—where is that Rebel officer?"

"I reckon ye mus' hev' drempt about him, Cap'n," the "double-faced Janus" responded [Pg 185] casually, with the superior air of humoring a delusion. "Ye been talkin' 'bout him afore whenst ye wuz deelerious. But dar ain't none ob dem miser'ble slave-drivers round dese diggin's now'-days, praise de Lawd! Freedom come wid de Union army."

This assurance convinced the Federal officer. The old servant's interest was so obviously with the invading force that his motive was not open to question. Moreover, it was not the first time that Baynell had dreamed of the Confederate officer, the erstwhile lover of Leonora Gwynn, whose splendid portrait hung on the wall, and whom she often mentioned with interest.

When the surgeon next called he expressed to his patient great surprise: "It is very natural that in your state of convalescence you should grow dizzy and fall; but I can't for my life understand how you contrived to get such a blow from the edge of a step. It has all the style about it of a hit straight from the shoulder of an expert boxer. Uncle Ephraim doesn't happen to be something of a pugilist, now?" he added jocosely, smiling and glancing at the old negro.

"I don't happen to be nuffin, sah, dat ain't perlite," grinned the amenable "Janus."

"Your friends downstairs seemed frightened out of their wits, Baynell,—lest your wound should be imputed to them, I suppose," the surgeon said openly, for he did not consider the [Pg 186] presence of the ex-slave.

"Yes, sah!" put in Uncle Ephraim, "eider me or Marster, or de widder 'oman, or de ladies air sure bound ter hev' knocked him up dat way, kase 'twould take a puffick reel-foot man ter fall downstairs dat fashion. Yah! Yah!"

It did not occur to Baynell to doubt this statement, and not one word did he say to the surgeon of his dream of the presence of the Confederate officer. He made no effort to account for the disaster, merely lending himself to the surgeon's view that he had grown suddenly dizzy and the stairs were steep in the third flight.

This gave the surgeon a disquieting sense of suspicion some time afterward. When returning from his tour of duty at the hospital he was again in the camp, he heard there the amazing rumor among the soldiers that a Confederate officer, covered with blood, had been seen to issue from the Roscoe house and with lightning-like speed disappear among the shrubbery. He wondered that Baynell should not have mentioned the commotion, forgetting that as he was unconscious he might be still unaware of the fact.

Dr. Grindley was not of a designing nature; but he was consciously experimenting when he said, rather banteringly, on his next visit, "How about the notion that there was a Confederate officer concealed in this house?"

[Pg 187] Baynell looked annoyed. He had heard as yet not an allusion to the raid upon the house during the period of his insensibility, and he did not know that the presence of a Confederate officer had even been rumored. He supposed that the doctor referred to the chance question he had asked Uncle Ephraim, and he deprecated the fact that the old man should have heedlessly repeated this. The dream of the altercation, as he fancied the recollection, was still vague in his mind, and with that quality of unreality and so blended with other visions of his delirium and fever that he in naught doubted its tenuous state as a figment of a disordered brain.

"There was no Rebel," he said somewhat gruffly.

"That was all merely the love of sensation?" asked the surgeon.

"Of course," Baynell assented, and fell silent.

This had been the conclusion among the officers of the surrounding camp, and it was not surprising to the surgeon that Baynell should share it, but there was a consciousness, a mortification, in his manner, that implied a personal interest and forced the question to be dropped. The surgeon had no wish to press it, and moreover he was anxious to avoid exciting the patient. He had some doubt as to the result of the fall; he was meditating seriously on symptoms which indicated that the skull had sustained a fracture. But when he remarked that all might be well if Captain Baynell remained quiet and stirred as little as possible, he was surprised and dismayed by the vehemence with which the patient declared [Pg 188] that he must move; he must leave the house; he could not, he would not stay under this roof another night, not even an hour longer. He requested the surgeon to make arrangements to attend him elsewhere, and rang the bell to send a message to camp directing his servant to come and get his personal effects. Only a sleeping-potion could restrain this determination at the time, and the next day a return of the fever and delirium solved the surgeon's problem how to bend the will of the refractory patient to the demands of his own best interests.

Uncle Ephraim found some difficulty in sustaining with composure the disasters and excitement and fears that crowded in upon him. He must play his part with requisite spirit when in presence of the public, and he must suffer in silence and alone. He dared not seek to confer apart with his master as to the next step, lest he rouse suspicion that they had some secret understanding, and had indeed harbored the enemy. He dared not confide his troubles even to his wife, Aunt Chaney, although he yearned for sympathy, for reassurance. The old cook, however, had not been admitted to any detail of the secret presence of Julius in the house. For aught she knew, even now, he was five hundred miles away.

[Pg 189] The perversity of the falling out of events dismayed and daunted old Ephraim. Only that morning—the morning of that momentous day—Captain Baynell had announced at the table the termination of his visit.

"An' it wuz time, too. 'Fore de Lawd, it wuz surely time," the old servant grumbled, in surly retrospect. For had the officer but taken his leave and his cigar together, how different it might all have been! "Marse Julius mought hev' seen Miss Leonora, an' mebbe de ladies, an' come down inter de house an' smoked a *see*gar wid his Pa. Lawdy, massy! wid de curtains drawed, an' de blinds down. Dat's whut he honed for! Oh, 'fore Gawd, I dunno whar dat baby-chile—dat pore leetle Julius—is now!"

His face caught a fleeting grimace to remember the height of the "baby-chile,"—but as helpless, as forlorn, as some tiny waif, and oh, so terribly threatened in this beleaguered, in this thrice-guarded, town!

When at last he was dismissed from his station in the sick room by the sinking of Baynell into slumber under the influence of the sedative administered by the surgeon, old Ephraim, succumbing both in physique and in spirit, even in gait, stumbled downstairs and took his way into the kitchen to find some talk of trifles, some stir of the familiar duties, that might enable him to be rid of his unquiet thoughts, of his dread prognostications, of his sheer terror of the future. He sunk into a wooden chair beside the stove, for the cooking of supper was already under way. He was feeling very old and weary. His countenance seemed to have [Pg 190] collapsed in some sort, so did his usual expression of brisk satisfaction and dapper respectfulness and reserve of intelligence prop and sustain its contours. Its bony structure

now seemed withdrawn. It was a sort of dilapidated mask of desolation. He drew a long sigh. And then he said:—

"Dis is a tur'ble, tur'ble world, mon!"

"Dis world is a long sight better dan de nex' world for *you*!" said his wife, rancorously prophetic. "You hear *me*!"

The imperious Chaney had not collapsed. Her "head-handkercher" was bestowed in a turban that had two high standing ends like tufts of feathers above her black, resolute face. Her black eyes snapped as she looked beyond him, not at him. She was stepping about, stoutly, firmly, audibly, in her Sunday shoes, for no amount of mourning materialized the lost slip-shod *chaussure*—pressed deep in the mud of the highway by wagon-wheels and the uninformed hoof of an unimaginative army mule.

Uncle Ephraim gazed up in growing anxiety, not to say fright, for Aunt Chaney's mood was not suave. She suddenly paused on the other side of the stove, and, gesticulating across it with a long spoon, demanded: "You—ole—*dee*stracted—cawnfield—hand! What fur did you send *me* fur de doctor-man?"

"Whut you go fur, den?"

[Pg 191] Aunt Chaney reflected on her appearance on the highway, in her old homespun dress, "coat," as she called it, one slipper, no bonnet, the cake-dough dripping from her hands. She remembered that some wagoners of a forage train, struck by her agitated aspect, had looked back to laugh from their high perches among the hay and fodder; she remembered that some little imp-like boys had twitted her, calling after her in their high, callow chirp, and sorry was she that she had not left all to chase them—to chase them till they died of fright! She—*she* who was accustomed to flaunt in a "changeable" silk, and her bonnet had an ostrich plume! She wore a bracelet, too, on grand occasions, and this was gold, solid and heavy, fine and engraved, for "Miss Leonora" herself had it bought in New Orleans expressly for her, after she had discovered and unaided extinguished a midnight fire. Not that old Chaney would have wasted all this splendor on the errand for the doctor. If she had thought but for a moment, she would have garbed herself as now, as she did instantly on her return home, to save her self-respect,—in a purple calico and a clean, white, domestic apron, with her respected and respectable green-and-white checked sun-bonnet, all laundered, as ever, to absolute perfection. Her haste had destroyed her judgment.

[Pg 192] "Whyn't ye tole me dat de man hed jes' fell downsteers,—when ye come out yere, howlin' lak a painter wid a misery in his jaw. I 'lowed de Yankee had deestroyed his-self on dese yere premises."

"So did I! So did I! He bled—and *bled*!" Old Ephraim paused, his face fallen. The association of ideas brought by the mention of blood was uncanny.

"What ailed de man dat he hatter fall downsteers?"

"I dunno." The denial was pat.

"Whut's he come down here fightin' in the War without he's able ter keep from fallin' downsteers? De Roscoes kin stan' up! I'll say dat fur 'em."

"Dey kin dat," replied the "double-faced Janus" admiringly, thinking of Julius.

"How long he gwine stay?"

"'Twell he git well, I reckon."

"Den *I* say dis ain't no house nor home. Dis is horspital Number Forty—dat's whut. Marse Gerald Roscoe ain't got no more sense 'n a good-sized chicken, dough he *is* a jedge, ter hev' dat man yere fur Miss Leonora ter keer fur, an' take ter marryin' agin 'fore her old sweetheart, Julius Roscoe, kin git home. 'Fore de Lawd, I stood it ez long ez dere seemed enny end to it, but now—" she banged her pots, and pans, and kettles about with virulence.

[Pg 193] "Marse Julius," she continued, "*he's* de man fur Leonora Roscoe,—*I* ain't gwine call her 'Gwynn,'—Marse Julius is good-hearted and free-handed; I knowed him from a baby, an' he wuz a big one! I always knowed he war in love wid her ever since dat Christmas up at the Devrett place, when he an' some o' dem limber-jack Devrett boys got inter de wall or inter de groun'—I dunno whar—an' sung right inter de company's ear, powerful mysterious,—skeered 'em all! Marse Julius, he tuk his guitar an' sung,—'Oh, my love's like a red, red rose!' An' she looked lak one while she listened, fur she knowed his voice. I wuz peekin' in at de company at de winder—Lawd—Lawd! I 'lowed *dat* would be a match—but yere come along dat Gwynn feller!"

A sudden white flare of burning lard spread over the red-hot stove, for Uncle Ephraim had sprung up so abruptly as to strike the long handle of the skillet and overturn the utensil.

"Ain't ye got no mo' use of yer haid 'n ter go buttin' 'roun' de kitchen, lak a ole deestracted Billy-goat, lak you is!" Aunt Chaney demanded.

As the smoke circled about she snatched up the skillet with its flaming contents.

"Git out my kitchen, else I'll scald de grizzled woolly soul out'n you!"

"Bress de Lawd, 'oman, *I* ain't wantin' ter stay in yer kitchen," said Uncle Ephraim, suddenly spry and saucy and brisk,—a trifle more brisk, indeed, accelerating his pace toward the door, as she took two or three long, agile, elastic steps toward him. [Pg 194]

"I got other feesh ter fry!" he chuckled to himself.

For the blazing lard but typified a certain illumination in old Ephraim's mind.

CHAPTER X [Pg 195]

It was a clear, gusty night when he emerged on the lawn at the side entrance of the house. For two hours with the faint and freakish light of candle ends he had been rummaging over old chests and boxes in the attic. The aspect of the desolate, deserted place that had held his young master, a tenant dear to his loyal heart, wrung from him a sigh. Sometimes he dropped his hands, lifted himself from his crouching attitude to a kneeling posture, looked wistfully about the dreary, dusty silence, shook his head sorrowfully to and fro, and then once more addressed himself to his search. When he began to find the various articles he desired, he grew tremulous, agitated. His breath was fast, and now and again he must needs check himself in his disposition to fluent soliloquy lest some one overhear in his sonorous voice such significant words as would reveal his intention. When these seizures supervened, he became anxious concerning the possible betrayal of his enterprise by the feeble light cast from the windows, and ever and anon he screened the bit of candle behind a trunk or some massive piece of furniture. He knew that the house was a marked spot; the events of the day had rendered the locality of special and suspicious interest to all the camps in the vicinity. Many an eye was turned thither, he was aware, as the evening drew on, and in fact he hardly dared to light the tiny tapers till he had heard tattoo sound and taps beat. The tents were lost in darkness and slumber, but there were the camp and quarter guards, and soon would come the patrol and grand rounds. The sentries about the house gave him less anxiety. [Pg 196]

"They be 'bleeged to know we-all keep some of our stuff in the garrit—mought be huntin' fur suthin' fur dat ar Yankee man's nicked haid. But *I ain't*!" he soliloquized.

When at last he had found all he desired, he extinguished the light and quietly waited. Thus in the darkness the place was even more grewsome with its associations of concealment and flight, the imminence of his young master's capture and violent death. He heard his heart plunge at every stir of the wind, every clash of the boughs, and he muttered: "Dat pore chile wuz denied a light. His Pa p'intedly wouldn't 'low him a candle, fur fear folks would spy it out. An' here he set an' waited in de ever-lastin' night!"

Old Ephraim suffered here in the dark from a terror which had loosed its hold on his young master long ago,—the fear of the supernatural. Ghosts of many types, "ha'nts," headless horrors, spectral sounds from the other world, direful prognostications of signs, all in grisly procession passed and repassed and crowded the garret to suffocation. It would be impossible to imagine what the old gray-headed negro saw and heard as he crouched on the dusty floor, and listened to the rout of the wind in the trees, and watched the eerie aspect of the old furniture, itself associated with the long-gone dead, as the moon and the gust-driven shadowy clouds flickered and faded and flickered and faded across the dim spaces. When suddenly a shrill sound pierced the ghostly solitude, he fell prone in complete surrender on the floor, terrified, his nerves almost shattered. An inarticulate scream came again and again, and then a low chuckling chatter. A screech-owl, a tiny thing, had alighted on the window-sill, and hearing the stir, turned its head without shifting its body, its great round eyes encountering the reproachful rolling stare of old Ephraim as he tremulously gathered himself from the floor. Taking a package under his arm under the long coat he wore, he at last went noiselessly and swiftly down the stairs. [Pg 197]

He looked out heedfully for Judge Roscoe, whom he did not wish to encounter.

"Marster hes been a jedge, an' dey say he hes set on de bench—dough I dunno whut fur dat's so oncommon, fur mos' ennybody kin set on a bench! He's sot in his own cushioned arm-chair in de lawbrary whut kin lean backwards on a spring, and recline his foots upwards, an' dat's a deal ch'icer dan enny bench I knows on! But he's been a jedge, an' he's got book-larnin', but somehow I 'low he ain't tricky enough ter be up ter *dis* kink. I ain't gwine ter let him know nuffin'." [Pg 198]

When fairly out of the house all suggestion of secrecy and caution vanished. The old darkey flung his feet on the stone steps with a noisy impact, and before he reached the pavement, he had burst into song, marking the time with an emphatic rhythm—a wide blare of melody with a great baritone voice, that sounded far down the bosky recesses of the grove, all dappled with shadow and sheen.

"Rise an' shine, *children*!
Rise an' *shine*, children!
Rise an' shine, *children*!
De angels bid me ter come along!
O-h-h, I want ter go ter heaben when I die—"

He broke off suddenly. He did not wait to be challenged by the sentry as he turned, but greeted him with a sort of plaintive humility and a mendicant's confiding manner.

"Marse Soldier, could ye gimme a chaw of terbacker, please, sir?"

The soldier would not have allowed even one of his own officers to pass from the house or enter it without the countersign, but he was thrown off his guard by this personal appeal; [Pg 199] and although he could not comply with the request, not being given to the bad habit of "chawin' terbacker," he shifted his weapon from hand to hand while he rummaged his pockets for "fine-cut" for the pipe of old Ephraim—the fraud, who was amply supplied.

"Neb mind—neb mind," the old man said deprecatingly. "Thanky, sah, thanky! Dere's anodder soldier round de front po'ch—mebbe he's got a chaw!"

And this sentinel, having listened to the colloquy with his comrade, as well as distance would permit, adopted his friendly tactics and was able to produce the requisite "chaw." He naturally supposed the countersign had been demanded and given at the door whence the servant of the house emerged, for after unctuous and profuse thanks old Ephraim swung off down the hill with another great gush of song—"I want ter go ter heaben when I die—" echoing far over the grove and the silent camps beyond.

Listening to the resounding progress of his departure the first sentry thought of course that in letting him pass his comrade had taken the countersign. It was only a vague thought, however, cast after him. "That old night-hawk is bound for the river, I guess, going fishing," for nocturnal angling was the favorite sport of the darkeys of the region.

The soldier did not even notice when the surge of the chant gave way to a musical whistle, still carrying the air with great spirit and a sort of enthusiasm of rhythm, "An' de angels bid [Pg 200] me ter come along." Still less did he discriminate the difference in the change of sound, not immediately apparent, so elusive was it, and difficult to describe, when a whistle of a different timbre took up the air and finished the phrase—"I'll shout salvation as I fly!" After a pause Uncle Ephraim was in the distance, humming now, and soon all sound ceased. Both the sentinels would have sworn he had quitted the grove.

But it was not alone the wind among the young firs that tossed their branches to and fro, when trembling, terrorized, casting now and then a horrified, rebuking glance at the radiant moon, as the flying scud drew back and left the sphere undimmed, he sought the spot he had marked when the responsive whistle had apprised him that his signal was understood and answered. At length he paused to catch his breath and wipe the cold drops from his brow.

"Lawdy massy! dese yere shines dat dis yere Rebel cuts up will be de death ob me—ef dey ain't de death ob himse'f fust!"

He judged from his close observation he was on the spot—yet he could not ascertain it. Suddenly hard by the roots of a great lush specimen of a Norway spruce, the boughs lying far on the ground, his foot slipped on the thick spread of the fallen needles. He could not recover himself. He was going down—down. His courage all evaporated. He would have [Pg 201] screamed if he could. In his terror he had almost lost consciousness till all at once he felt a strong grasp of aid and heard a familiar smothered laugh that restored his faculties with the realization of success and the recognition of a friend at hand.

"Hesh! Hesh!" he said imperatively. "Dat laffin' an' laffin' is gwine ter be de *de*struction ob you an' all yer house, an' 'fore de Lawd, ole Ephraim, too!"

He had no response, but he had submitted himself to guidance. He was being led along a downward course in a narrow subterranean passage, his feet shuffling and kicking uncertainly as he ludicrously sought for the ground and to accommodate his gait to the easy accustomed stride of his conductor. They made more than one turn before Julius paused and said: "We might as well stop here, Uncle Ephraim. We can sit down on the rocks. Did my father send me any message? Is the officer much hurt?"

"Do you think you kin pitch folks down them steep steers, an' not hurt 'em, you owdacious, mis*chie*vious chile! His head is consider'ble nicked,—an' dat's a fac'!"

"Is that all?" said Julius, evidently much relieved. "What word did my father send me?"

"No word! He didn't know whar dee is—an' I didn't tell him whar I was goin' ter hunt fur dee."

"Oh, but he *must* know—he must not be left so uneasy. Oh, how I wish I had never come to [Pg 202] disturb and endanger my good father!"

It was dark, and he did not care that Uncle Ephraim should hear his sobs.

"Now, look-a-yere, Marse Julius, chile—de less folks knows 'bout dee, de less dey is liable ter be anxious. What you reckon I brung dee?"

"Some supper?"

"Lawd, no! I ain't hed time ter git ye supper."

"Some money? I don't want any money. My father gave me money in case of any necessity when I was to run the pickets—*gold*!" He chinked some coins alluringly in his pocket.

"'Tain't money. It's—*cloes*!"

"Clothes?" said Julius, uncertainly.

"'Twas dat ar tarrifyin' Rebel uniform dat got dee in dis trouble ter-day. Ye got ter change dem cloes. Ye can't run de pickets, an' ye can't git out'n de lines nohow in dem cloes."

Julius hesitated. The uniform was in one sense a protection. To be taken in his proper character, even lurking in hiding, did not necessarily expose him to the accusation of being a spy which capture in disguise would inevitably fix upon him.

"What clothes did you bring,—Aunt Chaney's?" he asked, prefiguring a female disguise, and reflecting on the ample size and notable height of the cook.

A sort of sharp yelp of dismay came out of the darkness. Old Ephraim wriggled and shuffled his feet audibly on the rocks in his effort at emphasis and absolute negation. [Pg 203]

"Marse Julius you is gone *de*ranged! Surely, surely, you is los' what sense you ever had! Chaney wouldn't loan ye ez much ez a apern or a skirt out'n her chist ter save ye from de pit o' perdition! I hes been reckless and darin' in my time, but de Lawd knows I never was so forsook by Providence as ter set out ter carry off any wearin' apparel belongin' ter dat 'oman, what's gin ober ter de love o' de cloes in her chist. Dat chist is de idol ob dat *de*stracted heathen 'oman, an' de debbil will burn her well for de love o' de vanities she's got tucked away dar. Chaney's cloes! Gawd A'mighty! *Chaney's* cloes! Borry *Chaney's* cloes!"

"Well, whose clothes, then, Uncle Ephraim? You know I couldn't get into the citizen's clothes I left at home. I'm three inches taller, and a deal stouter. And it would be dangerous to try to buy clothes."

"Lissen; I disremembered dere wuz a trunk in de garret what wuz brung down from de Devrett place when de Yankees tore down de house an' built de fort. It b'longed ter yer cousin Frank's wife's brother, an' wuz sent home atter de war broke out when he died in some outlandish place—I dunno whar, in heathen land. As I knowed he wuz tall an' spare, I 'lowed de cloes mought fit dee. So I opened de trunk—an' de cloes wuz comical; but not as [Pg 204] comical as a Rebel uniform in dese days an' dis place."

Julius had a vague vision of himself, robed in the comicalities of the dress of the Orient,—Japanese or Arabian or Turkish,—seeking an escape in obscurity and inconspicuousness, through the closely drawn Federal lines.

"Oh, Uncle Ephraim!" he whined, almost in tears, because of the futility of every device, every hope.

"You wait till I show dem ter dee!" exclaimed Uncle Ephraim, hustling out the bundle from under his coat.

It proved to be a small portmanteau that had been itself enclosed in the trunk. This much was discernible by the sense of touch. Old Ephraim placed it on the ground, and then, lowering his voice mysteriously, he asked solemnly, "Marse Julius, is you sure acquainted with dis place?"

"I certainly am," declared Julius, the tense vibration of triumph in his voice. "I know it from end to end!"

"Den, ef I wuz ter strike a light, could dem sentries see hit at de furder e-end?"

"Not to save their souls. We're ever so far down, and the tunnel has already made three turns."

"Ef dey wuz ter follow us, dey couldn't crope up unbeknownst on us?"

"They'd break their necks at the entrance if they didn't know the place or have a ladder."

"Dere is a ladder ter de stable, dough," the old man urged, vaguely uneasy. [Pg 205]

"We'd hear 'em putting it down."

"Dat's so! Dat's so!" cried Uncle Ephraim, all cheerful alacrity once more.

He forthwith struck a match and lighted one of his candle ends, which he fixed on the ledge of the rock by holding it inverted for a few minutes, then on the hot drippings placing the taper erect. He had shielded it with his hand during this process, and on perceiving no draught whatever, looked up in amazement at the strange surroundings—a rugged stone tunnel stretching far along into the dense blackness of the distance, fifteen feet in height,

perhaps, and of varying width,—about ten feet where they stood; evidently this was an offshoot of some extensive subterranean system, not uncommon in the cavernous limestone country, therefore exciting scant interest, and perhaps never heretofore explored, even in part, save by Julius and the Devrett boys when it might be made a factor in Christmas fun.

"De Lawd-a-massy," exclaimed Uncle Ephraim, looking about in awe and by no means prepossessed in favor of the aspect of the place. "Is disher de bestibule ob hell?"

But the attention of Julius was concentrated on the portmanteau, a very genteel-looking receptacle, which when open disclosed the garments that Uncle Ephraim considered so comical. They were, indeed, a contrast with his standard of proper attire for a "gemman of [Pg 206] quality"—this being the judge's fine black broadcloth, with a black satin waistcoat and stock, and with linen laid in plaits, the collar standing in two sharp points. But for the first time that day Julius had a sudden hope of deliverance. No kaftan, kimono, nor burnoose as he had feared, but he was turning in his hands a soft, rough-surfaced tweed of a dark fawn color, with tiny checks of the style called invisible, the coat bound with a silk braid on which Uncle Ephraim laid a finger of doubt and inquiry, looking drearily up into the young man's face. For this was a novel finish indeed in those days.

"These are of English make," said the discerning Julius, beginning to understand that the foreign "heathen land" to which old Ephraim had referred was England. Julius now remembered that his cousin's brother-in-law, James Wrayburn, had been sojourning there at the time of his death. The garments had lain in the garret for more than a year, but in those days so slow was the transmission of styles across the Atlantic that the cut was by no means antiquated, indeed was in accord with the fashion that was familiar on the main street of the town. There was a hat of soft felt of a deep brown, and the old servant had added from the trunk two or three white Marseilles waistcoats and some neckties and linen.

"Dee got on good new boots," he observed, glancing down at the young man's feet. [Pg 207]

"Ought to be—cost me six hundred dollars!" said Julius.

"Lo!—my Heabenly Friend!" exclaimed Uncle Ephraim, falling back aghast, unaccustomed to the inflations of the currency of the Confederacy.

When the transformation was complete, he looked up from his knees, in which lowly posture he had assisted in drawing down the trousers over the boots, and smiled broadly in satisfaction.

"Dar now!" he exclaimed. "'Fore de Lawd, ye look plumb beau-some in dem comical cloes. Dey becomes ye! Dat they does—dough I ain't never see no such color as they got, 'dout 'twuz on a cow!"

He made up a bundle of the Confederate uniform and stowed it away on one of the ledges. "I don't want dem Yankees ter ever git no closer ter dis yere shed snake-skin dan dey is now."

But after the old man had been assisted to clamber out of "the vestibule of hell" by the stalwart arm of his young master and had disappeared among the firs, Julius made up the uniform into a compact bundle, packed it into the portmanteau, and, putting out the candle, sat down in the obscurities of the subterranean passage to await the enhanced opportunity for escape that the dark clouds, now gathering about the moon, might bring to the fortuitous [Pg 208] collocation of circumstance.

When the sentries next heard any suggestion of Uncle Ephraim's presence, he was still singing on his return,—now and then humming and whistling as he came. He was approaching the house from the driveway, having indeed been to the river; he was bringing home a goodly mess of fish.

CHAPTER XI [Pg 209]

An hour later there was a more significant landfall than the fate of these finny trophies. Few of the river craft kept their dates of arrival with certainty, and this was especially the case with the general packets. Though the water was high, the operations of the Confederates rendered the passage sometimes unsafe, sometimes impracticable. Now and again the Federal authorities pressed a boat into government service for a time and released it to its owners and its old traffic when the emergency was past. Therefore on this dull night, when no sign or news was received of the *Calypso*, overdue some ten hours, the wharf became deserted. Hardly a light showed on the river banks or along the spread of the stream, save indistinct gleams in the misty gloom where the picket boats kept up a ceaseless vigilant patrol. The gunboats, with a vaguely saurian suggestion lay with their noses in the mud. Here and there in allotted berths were the ordinary steamboats with their curiously flimsy aspect, as if constructed of white cardboard, silent, disgorged, asleep. The rafts, the coal-

barges, the humble skiffs, and flatboats were all tied up for the night. The town had lapsed to silence and slumber as the hour waxed late. The great pale stream seemed as vacant as the great pale sky. [Pg 210]

Suddenly far down the river two lights, close together, high in the air, red and green, shimmering through the mist, struck the attention of a wanderer along the high bluffs near Judge Roscoe's house, even before a hoarse, remonstrant, outspreading sound, the clamor of the whistle three times repeated, hailing the landing, invaded the murky air. It was a spell to rouse all the precincts of the river bank. Lights flickered here and there. Hack drivers, who had given up the expectation of the boat's arrival at any hour that would admit of the transfer of the passengers to the hotel, heard the sound from afar, harnessed their teams in haste, and the carriages came rattling turbulently down the stony declivity to the wharf. Baggage vans, empty and curiously noisy, recklessly jolted along, careening ill-poised and light without their wonted burdens. The omnibuses, with the glow of their dim little front windows to distinguish their approach, were soon on the scene; the driver of one was vociferating with a hackman, because of the lack of lighted carriage lamps, which had caused a collision and the wrenching away of the door and the cover of the step of the "bus," swaying open for want of a cautionary pull on the cord. Loud and turbulent did this wrangle grow, and presently it was punctuated by blows. The crowd that the mere sound of a fight [Pg 211] summons from invisibility was almost instantly swaying about the scene and hindering the efforts of the police, who found it necessary to interfere, and while both participants were arrested and hurried off to the station in the clutches of the law, they left their respective vehicles like white elephants in the hands of the remainder of the force, two of whom must needs mount the boxes to restrain the "cattle," as the hack driver mournfully called his beasts in commending them to police protection. The horses plunged and reared, terrified at the apparition of the *Calypso*, now manœuvring and turning in the river, the paddles beating upon the water with a splashing impact as the side-wheels slowly revolved. The ripples were all aglow with the reflection of her red furnace fires, and her cabin lights sent long avenues of white evanescent radiance into the vague riparian glooms. The jangle of the pilot bells and the sound of the exhaust pipes came alternately on the air. And presently the great white structure was motionless, towering up into the gray uncertainties of the night, the black chimneys seeming to fairly touch the clouds, the lacelike guards filled with flitting figures all in wild commotion pressing toward the stairway.

Albeit the discharge of the freight would not take place till morning, the scene was one of great confusion. In accordance with the regulation which the military occupation of the [Pg 212] country required, the passengers rendered up their passes on deck to the officer who had boarded the vessel for the purpose of receiving them, permitting the travellers to depart one by one through a guarded gate, but it was impossible to identify them after they were once on the wharf. Hence there was naught to distinguish from the other passengers a gentleman carrying a portmanteau, who entered an omnibus, save that the wharf lamps might have shown that he was handsome, taller than common, with a fine presence and gait, and clad in garments of unmistakably English cut and make. The night clerk of the hotel evidently saw nothing else unusual in the stranger as he stood under the gas-jet to register at the desk in the office, almost deserted at this hour—not even in the momentary hesitation when he had the pen in hand. He wrote "John Wray, Junior, Manchester, England," had a room assigned to him, and passed on to the late supper, for which Uncle Ephraim's negligence had prepared him to do ample justice.

Julius did not appear next morning at the usual breakfast hour. The terrors of the Chinese gong, that was wont to rouse the laggards as it howled about the hotel under the belaborings of a stalwart waiter, failed to stimulate his activity or break his slumber. The fatigues and dangers Julius had encountered had prostrated him. He was unconsciously [Pg 213] recuperating, gathering strength for the rebound. He did not wake, indeed, till near noon. He turned once or twice luxuriously in the comfortably sheeted bed—at his home they had not dared to purloin linen from the household store to furnish his couch in the attic—and then, with his hands clasped under his head, he lay with a mind almost vacant of any conscious process, mechanically, quietly, taking in the details of the place. The sun sifted in at a crevice of the green shutters of the window that opened to the floor and gave upon a wide gallery without—now and again he heard at considerable intervals the passing of a footstep on this gallery. He noticed the wind stir and the flicker of the shadow of foliage on the blinds. The room was in the second story, and he knew that there were trees in a space at the rear of the old-fashioned little hotel. The furniture was of a highly varnished, cleanly, straw-colored aspect, of some cheap wood that refreshingly made no pretentions to be aught but what it was, for on the bureau drawers, the head and foot-boards of the bed, and on the rocking-chair was painted a gay little bouquet of flowers in natural but intense tints. A fresh Chinese matting was on the floor, and muslin curtains hung from poles supported on pins that had a great brass rosette or boss at the extremity. The building enclosed a quadrangle, bounded by the river at the lower end. On each of the other three sides the wide galleries of [Pg 214] the three-story brick edifice overlooked the grassy space. He had learned that the hotel had gone into the hands of a new proprietor, but even were it otherwise he hardly feared recognition, although he had been born and reared in the immediate vicinity. At his time of life a few years work great changes. The boy of nineteen was hardly to be identified in the man of twenty-two, with his mustached lips, his broadened shoulders, his three inches of added height, and the composure, confidence, and capability conferred by those years of activity and emergency and responsibility working at high pressure. Some old resident

might recognize the Roscoe eye, but he knew he could trust the kindly associations of "auld lang syne" to avoid the sifting of a casual recollection. Besides, this was hardly likely to befall, for the town was an ever shifting kaleidoscope of confused humanity. It was full of strangers,—Federal officers, on service and unattached, on leave of absence, wounded, and their families; special correspondents; hospital nurses; emissaries of the Sanitary Commission; enterprising promoters of all manner of jobs, and the horde of nondescript non-combatants that hangs on the rear of every army, seeking the many methods of securing a windfall from the vast expenditures of money and goods necessary to maintain a great force on a war footing. He was hardly likely to meet any one who had ever known him, or even his [Pg 215] father, in his stay at the hotel, which he must contrive by some method to make as short as practicable. Then suddenly a great dismay fell upon him. He lifted his head and gasped as he looked about him for something that was gone! His treacherous memory!—in the prostration of his mental faculties by excitement and fatigue, in the lull of his long slumber, he had forgotten the alias he had registered as his own name on his entrance to the hotel. He thought of half a dozen of the most usual nomenclature, striving to goad his mind to a recognition of each in turn as the one he had selected. He was in desperation. True, he might have an opportunity to study the register and could recognize his own handwriting. But something—anything might occur in the interval in which it might be necessary to give the name he had assumed, and any incongruity with the registered alias would be fatal. Every casual step along the hall on one side, or the gallery on the other, threw him into a sudden tremor as he prefigured a stoppage, a knock, an inquiry—"Are you Mr. Alfred Jones?—here's a note for you. Messenger waits for an answer."

"And *I* don't know whether to answer as Mr. Jones or not!" he said to himself in a panic. He might turn away a note of warning from his father, who possibly had recognized his handwriting on the register, of greeting from Leonora in whose face he had seen an appalled [Pg 216] commiseration as he sped past her yesterday in his father's hall; or it might be that some Confederate agent within the lines would hear of his plight and contrive this way to communicate with him. No matter how cautiously worded, his was not a correspondence at this juncture to decline to receive, and to turn lightly over to the investigating scrutiny of all the A. Joneses to whom it might be presented. On the other hand he might "throw all the fat in the fire," should he meddle with the large correspondence of the Jones family by opening sealed missives bearing their name, obviously not intended for him, if he had registered as Abner Smith.

Julius was about to spring up, throw on his clothes, and rush to the register, when the name struck him with the force of conviction. *John Wray*—That was it! *Manchester, England!* The address had been selected to take advantage of the typically English clothes. He meditated upon it as he sat upright in bed. He had added the "Junior," for the sake of verisimilitude. He smiled with satisfaction to have regained it. Then—"I must have something to fix that in my memory," he said.

He looked fruitlessly about. He had no paper, save the map in the lining of his boot, no pencil, no pen and ink, naught for a memorandum. Then with his gay youthful inconsequence—"Constant repetition will settle it—Mr. John Wray—Mr. John Wray; Mr. John [Pg 217] Wray. How do you do to-day?"

He threw himself back on his pillow, laughing at the unintentional rhyme.

"I'm a poet—if I did but know it!"

His irrepressible youthful mirth found its account in the most untoward trifles.

"There it is again!" he said to himself, "I have destroyed the sequence of my ideas. I am just as likely now to say, 'I am Mr. Poet'—or perhaps with the notion that I have got to butt out of this somehow—'I am Mr. Goat!'"

He laughed again, yawned lazily, stretched his arms upward, and fell back luxuriously on the bed, resting his tired muscles.

He lay staring at the design of the wall-paper, which was in scrolls of brown that, as they whorled over clear enamelled spaces of creamy white, enclosed an outline in fainter browns and yellow,—a scene of waves breaking on rocks and surmounted by a lighthouse; a far and foreign suggestion to this deeply inland nook, and refreshing, for there was more than vernal warmth in the air. And presently, still repeating—"Mr. John Wray, how do you do to-day?" he slipped off into a half-conscious doze from which he was roused only by a knock at the door.

CHAPTER XII [Pg 218]

Downstairs in the hotel there had been the usual stir of the morning. Till a late hour the punkahs had swung back and forth above the long tables in the dining room, each furnished

with one of those primitive contrivances for the banishment of flies. The swaying of the pendent fringes of paper rivalled the rustling of the trees in the quadrangle outside, on which the broad, long windows looked, as each punkah-cord was pulled by a specimen of the cheerful and alert pickaninny of that day, keenly interested in all that occurred. Others ran in and out of the kitchen, bearing to the waiters, to be dispensed among the guests, interminable relays of the waffles of those times, golden brown, delicately rich, soft, yet crisp, of a peculiar lightness,—a kind that will be seen no more, despite the food inventions and dietetic improvements, for the artists of that choice cookery are all dead and their receipts only serve to mark the decadence of proficiency.

Strangers of all sorts, officers of the army, civilians from every quarter of the north, filled the public apartments, aimlessly chatting, discussing the news from the front, smoking matutinal cigars, buying papers from the omnipresent newsboys, or reading them in the big [Pg 219] arm-chairs within or on the benches under the trees in the quadrangle, glimpsed in attractive verdure through the open doors of the office. There was continual passing through the halls, and groups filled the verandas and stood about on the sidewalk in front of the hotel, for the great brick pillars that supported the roof of the arcade at the height of the third story were anchored at the curb of the pavement, and this colonnade illustrated the forgotten architect's idea of impressiveness.

In the gay sunshine, the streets, with substantial two and three storied buildings on either side, with much effect of big airy windows and now and again a high, iron-railed balcony, were congested with traffic. The pavements were crowded with pedestrians of varying aspect,—freedmen in rags, idle, exhaustlessly zealous of sensation, grotesquely slouching along, eying the shop windows, seeing all that there was to be seen; soldiers in uniform on furlough; citizens of a new migration, having almost superseded the old townsmen, so limited were the latter in number in comparison with the present population of the gorged town; ladies, many the wives and daughters of Federal officers, with an unfamiliar accent and walk, and with toilettes of a more recent style than characterized the native exponents of fashion. Now and again some passing body of troops filled the avenue,—cavalry, with [Pg 220] guidon and trumpet, or a jaunty progress of infantry, to the fife and drum and the tune of "The girl I left behind me!"

At this period the war had focussed a sort of superficial prosperity here. The counters were covered with Northern goods to supply the needs and excite the extravagance of this medley of congregated humanity. Street venders howled their wares in raucous voices that added to the unintelligible clamors of the old highways that were wont to be so dull and quiet and decorous.

The paving stones roared with the reverberation of wheels. Sometimes endless trains of white-hooded army wagons defiled by; again heavy open transfers; sometimes an ambulance anguish-laden passed slowly, taking the crown of the causeway. Occasionally a light-wheeled buggy whisked about with the unmistakable effect of display and with a military charioteer handling the ribbons, who found the Tennessee blooded roadsters much to his mind. And forever the dray, laden with cotton bales sometimes, and sometimes with boxes, or barrels, or hogsheads, took its drag-tailed way to the depots or to the wharf. All was dominated by the presence of the mule—in force, driven loose in hundreds through the town to some remote scene of usefulness, now drawing the great transfers and drays, now giving an exhibition of the peculiar pertinacity of mule nature by planted hoofs and ears laid back and [Pg 221] a resolution of immovableness, bringing the whole tumultuous noisy rout to a blockade of such intricacy and cumbrous obstructiveness that one might wonder by what magic the interlocked wheels, the twisted harness, the crowded beasts, the whistling, long-thonged whips and shouting, swearing men were ever disentangled.

These incidents impeded progress, and the passengers from the noon railroad train were disposed to complain and comment, and seemed fit subjects for sympathy, as they interchanged petulant accounts of experiences at the hotel desk, waiting to register. One was apparently not unknown to the clerk now in charge, an affable functionary to the deserving few, altogether stiff and unapproachable to the general public. He was the day clerk, and a far more magnificent individual than the forlorn night bird that languished behind the desk with no company but the wee sma' hours of the clock, and the somnolent bell-boys on their bench, and the watchman, walking hither and thither like a ghost as if his only mission were to be about, and the incoming traveller. The day clerk's courtesy had the grace of a personal compliment as he hurried the book away from the last signer and passed it on to another in the line,—a somewhat portly, red-faced, middle-aged gentleman, with short side-whiskers, of the hairbrush effect and a pale hue, not definitely gray, for he [Pg 222] seemed hardly old enough for such tokens of years, and yet the flaxen tint had lost its earlier lustre. His hair was of the same shade, and he wore a stiff hat, a suit of "pepper-and-salt," and a dark overcoat of light weight.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Wray," said the clerk, handing him the pen. "I am sorry I can't give you a room to yourself, but I can put you a bed in your son's room."

The pen was poised uncertainly—the gentleman with the side-whiskers stared.

"Your son got in last night," explained the clerk.

The gentleman still silently stared. He had a close, compact mouth, a cautious mouth, and

the lips were now compressed with an expression of waiting incommunicativeness. He evidently had not expected to be confronted with a ready-made family.

The clerk surprised in turn cast on him a glance of keen intentness. In these strenuous times every stranger in the town was liable to suspicion as a Confederate emissary. "I was not on duty, myself, but I thought I saw—ah—here it is," turning the page of the register, "John Wray, Junior, Manchester, England."

For one moment the portly gentleman gazed at the signature as if dumfounded. Then with an air of ready recognition he justified his previous manifestations of extreme surprise by explaining the mistake of the clerk as to the matter of identity.

"Oh, aw, a distant relative," he said, at last. "Ah, aw,—he is the son of a cousin of the same name as mine, 'John Wray.' The younger man is to be associated with me in business. What room? Number ninety?" [Pg 223]

And as he was assigned to that haven he took the pen and wrote, "John Wray, Manchester, England."

Thus it was that, awakened by the brisk tap at the door, Julius, leaning out of bed, turned the key, and reached out for the pitcher of ice water for which, being warm and thirsty, he had a drowsy impression that he had rung the bell. Perceiving his mistake, and lifting himself on his elbow, Julius beheld entering this blond and robust stranger, an inexplicable apparition, too solid for a spectre, too prosaic for a fancy.

The visitor stood, when the door had closed, gazing silently down at the recumbent figure, while Julius, amazed at the form which his Nemesis had taken, gazed up silently and lugubriously at the intruder.

All the methods of Mr. John Wray were in conformity with his portly rotundity, his slow respectability, his unimaginative commercialism.

The young man found speech first. "Why this unexpected pleasure?" he asked ceremoniously, but with a satiric inflection.

"Sorry to intrude, I'm sure," said the elder. "But my name is John Wray of Manchester, England." [Pg 224]

The skies had fallen on Julius. He strove to recover himself.

"And do you like it?" he asked vacuously.

"*You* seemed to like it well enough to register it."

"With a 'Junior,' if you please."

The other fixed him with a stare of round blue eyes. "I think I understand you, sir."

"Very possibly," said poor Julius. "I am not very deep."

He was thinking that this was doubtless a military detective, a very usual factor for ferreting out schemes, obnoxious to the Federal government and in aid of the Confederacy. He determined to hold hard and sell his life dear.

"Have you any letters or papers—any written communication for me?"

"None whatever," Julius ventured.

"You knew you would meet me here?" the older man apparently wished to say as little as he might.

"I fancied I should meet you, but not in this manner," said Julius, also enigmatical.

The portly gentleman looked painfully nonplussed and ill at ease, as he sat in the light little yellow rocking-chair, which now and again treacherously tilted backward and caused him a momentary but agitated effort at equilibrium, and Julius vaguely remembered to have heard that rocking-chairs were not popular in England, and reflected that this worthy was not accustomed to have his centre of gravity so jeopardized. [Pg 225]

"I think I should have had ampler voucher. You will pardon me for saying this?" remarked the stranger, at length.

"I will pardon you for saying anything you like," said Julius, politely.

"The Company informed me that a young man familiar with the country—a native, in fact—would meet me here and that I should be afforded means to identify him. I fancied he would have letters. But when I saw the register I supposed this the mark of identification. Am I right?"

"My dear sir, you must not expect me to guarantee your impressions," said Julius. He was glad he was in bed. He felt that he could not have stood up. "I should say, judging from the effect your valuable mental qualities make upon me, that any impression you see fit to entertain would be amply justified by the fact."

He did not know how to appraise the distinction of his own manner and special attractiveness, and he was both amazed and amused to note how Mr. John Wray of Manchester, England, expanded under the compliment.

"I see, I see—I suppose this is even better than a letter, which might have been stolen, or transferred, or—however, or—shall we proceed to our commercial affairs?" [Pg 226]

"I don't usually transact commercial affairs in my night-shirt," said Julius, "but if I look sufficiently businesslike to suit you—just fire away; it's all the same to me."

He was growing reckless. The risk involved in this war of words with the supposed detective was overwhelming his reserves. He did not know certainly of what the man suspected him, how fully informed he might have become. He knew it was imprudent to suggest his withdrawal, for the effort at escape might precipitate immediate arrest. Yet he could no longer spar back and forth.

"However," he said, as if with a second thought, "I *should* like a dabble of a bath, first, and to get on my duds, and to have a whack at breakfast, or dinner,—whichever is on parade by this time."

"Certainly—certainly—by all means. I will meet you in the hotel office, and shall we dine together at two?" He held out the dial of his watch.

"At two," assented Julius.

His friend was in such polite haste to be gone that he shuffled and plunged awkwardly on his gaitered feet, fairly stumbling over his portmanteau near the door as he opened it; then he went down the hall with a brisk, elastic step. Julius lay dumfounded, staring at the [Pg 227] portmanteau, which was of an English make and bore the letters, J. Wray, Manchester, England, on one side. He rose and turned it about. It had not been hastily arranged to mislead him. The lettering had been done long ago. The receptacle was evidently travel-worn, and stamped deep in the bottom was the makers' name, trunk manufacturers, Manchester, England.

Julius dressed in haste, his heart once more agitated with the hope of deliverance. He could hardly control his nerves, his eager desire that this might prove merely an odd coincidence, instead of a detective's deep-laid scheme. It began to seem that the man's name might be really John Wray of Manchester, England, some army jobber, or speculator, perhaps—the country was full of them. He said he had expected to meet an "agent of the company," who knew the country.

"*I* know the country," said Julius, capably; "I know the country to a t-y ty. I can give him all the information he wants, free, gratis, and for nothing."

Yet in naught, he resolved, would he betray himself. This mistake, on the contrary, might open to him some means of getting through the lines and back to his command with this map—this precious plan of the defences of the place that would be of distinct value to the cause of the Confederacy.

He therefore cast aside his half-formulated scheme of seeking escape from the supposed [Pg 228] detective through the street. He had remembered that there were stairs on the galleries, leading from one floor to another, and thence to the quadrangle, as well as the great main staircase from the hallways into the office. He at last took his way, however, down this main staircase, with its blatant publicity, and its shifting groups of Federal officers and busy, newly imported civilians. He recognized the wisdom of his boldness almost immediately. Mr. John Wray of Manchester, England, standing conferring amicably with a cluster of worthies of that marked commercial aspect, alertness, and vim of expression, which imply the successful business man of the heady, venturesome type, since known as "plungers," turned and perceived him, and catching his eye beckoned to him with great empressement.

"Allow me, gentlemen, to introduce Mr. John Wray, Junior—the son of my cousin, John Wray," he said.

There ensued the usual greetings, the usual stir of hand-shaking, and if any eye in the office had chanced to note the newcomer with the faint suggestion of doubt or interest or suspicion, which a stranger is apt to excite, it evaporated at once, for the elder Mr. Wray was well known in the hotel and the town, having been here often before, and was a very sufficient voucher for any kinsman.

Genial indeed this group proved at dinner, seated on either side of the upper portion of one [Pg 229] of the long tables. Julius found it accorded with his subsidiary character as youthful kinsman of one of the chief spokesmen to maintain an intelligent and receptive silence. Once or twice one of the more jovial of his newly acquired cousin's *confrères* gave him a glance and lifted his wine-glass with a nod, as who should say, "To you, sir," in the midst of the general discourse.

This was eagerly commercial, for the most part, and piecing the details together as he plied his knife and fork, Julius learned that his new friend was interested in a flourishing American concern which had large government contracts for ready-made army clothing, the woollen cloth and other textile fabrics being supplied from Manchester, and was indeed one

of the English agents. He could not reconcile anything that he heard with a requisite for caution or for any service which he could perform, necessitating secrecy or an alias, or his sudden and affectionate adoption as a kinsman.

"It is a trait of piety to trust in Providence," Julius reflected in this quiescent state. "But I doubt if my confiding reliance in this fix can be set down to my credit. For the Lord knows there's nothing else to do!"

He created the impression of a decorous, well-bred youth, and in the fashionable English clothes he looked little less British than the elder John Wray. There was so much good- [Pg 230] fellowship that it was natural that the postprandial cigars with a decanter and glasses should be taken out to a summer-house in the quadrangle, where at one extremity the river had a slant of the westering sun on its surface. The hills of the distance were of a dull grapelike blue against an intensely turquoise sky; the magnolia trees above their heads already bore fine cream-white blossoms among the densely green and glossy foliage, and the surrounding town was cut off from sight and sound by the three encompassing sides of the hotel. Yet it was not a solitary place. No one looking at the group could imagine it had been chosen for seclusion. From the galleries of each of the three stories a glance could command it. Guests were continually sauntering into and out of the office. Here and there a Federal officer strolled along the little esplanade above the water-side. On the lower veranda two elderly men—one a chaplain—were playing very slowly and with great circumspection a game of chess. There were onlookers here, with whom time seemed no object, calmly studying the moves, solaced by a meditative cigar, and at long intervals showing a flicker of excitement at the magic word, "Check!"

The summer-house had already a thatch of vines, but bare columns upheld the roof, and it occupied a little circular space of gravel, whence a broad gravel walk ran toward each point of the compass. An approach could be instantly observed, a step instantly heard, and [Pg 231] therefore it did not seem to Julius altogether incongruous that business of importance and details of secrecy should presently be broached. The table in the centre was all at once covered with papers, and he began to understand the mysteries that had hitherto baffled him when gradually the details of a very bold and extensive blockade-running scheme were unfolded.

This was in defiance, of course, of the Federal regulations, and in so far militated against no interest of the government that Julius had sworn to serve. But it was a private enterprise for personal profit, and whether the export of cotton from the country to England at this juncture accorded with the policy of the Confederate States he had no means of knowing. At one time, he was aware, there existed an impression that the official withholding of such shipments as could be effected by running the blockade tended to create such paucity of the staple in the English market as might influence the already pronounced disposition of the British to interfere in aid of the Confederacy, and bringing the war to an end remove this restriction of manufactures and trade. All this was beyond his province. He held very still, remained keenly observant, watching for the loophole that might enable him to quit these tortuous ways for the very simple matter of fighting the battles of his section. After these [Pg 232] various turmoils of doubt, and hope, and despair, it would be a mere trifle to charge with his company to the muzzles of the biggest howitzers that ever bellowed.

He discovered that these men were in correspondence with secret agents in the Confederacy; they spoke of various depots of the cotton which presently developed as mere caches—bales hidden in swamps, to be brought out only by such craft as could navigate bayous, or in deserted gin-houses on abandoned plantations, or in old tumble-down warehouses on the outskirts of towns,—never much at any one point, but all that could be found and bought, and concealed and held, to be gotten away at last to a foreign market. The system sought to reach to the Gulf of Mexico, to gather up the scattered wayside stores, and either by taking advantage of some lapse of Federal vigilance, or else by strategy, to run the blockade with a ship-load, and away for England! Thus the enterprise was contrary to the policy of both factions. The Company's gold would recruit the endurance of the South, and yet he knew that the Confederate authorities had put the torch to thousands of bales rather than let the cotton fall into their enemy's hands—the precious commodity, then selling at amazing prices in the markets of New York.

Suddenly his own personality came into the scheme with an abruptness that made his head whirl.

"How is it," demanded a sharp-featured man, who had sparse sandy hair, very straight, very [Pg 233] thin, the head almost bald on top extending the effect of the forehead, watery-blue eyes that nevertheless made out very accurately the surrounding country, metaphorically considered, a somewhat wrinkled face albeit he was not old—"how is it that your cousin should be so well acquainted with the country? I take it that he is an Englishman, too!"

"Why, no, he is not," candidly answered Mr. John Wray, and Julius had an instinct to clutch at him from across the table to hinder the divulging of the imposture, "and, in fact, he is not my kinsman at all. I should be extremely glad if he were," and he smiled suavely across the table at Julius. "He is, I understand, a native of this region." And forthwith he told the story of the register.

The spare, businesslike man, whose name was Burrage, at once laid his cigar down on the

table with its ash carefully disposed over the edge.

"And did he bring no letters?"

"None; very properly. It is most unwise to multiply papers in the hands of outside parties."

"But he should have had something definite."

"I think the registry of the name very definite." Mr. John Wray reddened slightly. He was not in the habit of being called in question for precipitancy.

"It strikes me as a most fantastic whim on the part of the Company. You might not have [Pg 234] interpreted it correctly—taken as you were by surprise," Mr. Burrage rejoined. Then, "Did *you* have any specific instructions to guide you personally?" The querist turned full on the young man, much to Mr. John Wray's disapproval. But Julius answered easily:—

"None at all. It is my business to hold myself subject to orders."

"What is your name?" queried Mr. Burrage.

"At present—John Wray, very much at your service," Julius replied glibly; then with a sudden recollection of the vicissitudes of "Mr. Poet" and "Mr. Goat," he burst into his irresistible laugh, that cleared the frown from the brow of the actual Mr. John Wray and his colleagues, and caused the officers pacing along the esplanade, their shadows long now in the sun, to glance in the direction of the sound, sympathetic with the unknown jest.

Mr. Burrage pressed the matter no farther, but as he took up his cigar again, filliping off the ash with a delicate gesture, and placed it between his teeth once more, no physiognomist would have been required to discern in his resolute facial expression a firm determination to have full advices on this subject before he should ever lose sight of the very prepossessing young man introduced by Mr. John Wray.

"He goes out with the little steamboat down the river. I think a packet leaves to-morrow." [Pg 235] Mr. Wray began to explain the simplicity of the duties devolving upon Julius in order to demonstrate his own perspicacity and regard for precaution. "At her stoppages he visits the plantations on his list, notifies the men in charge of the cotton to get it out on the rafts and flatboats and to be ready to float down—there's a full sufficiency of water on the shoals now—to where the steamer we have chartered, bought, in fact, can pick it up. Then he returns on the next packet. It is a trip of a hundred miles or so."

Julius felt his heart beat tumultuously in the prospect of escape—to be out of the town once more! But to-morrow! what in the interval might betide!

"The point is to have our own steamboat clear fairly with the upper-country consignment. The rest she picks up as she goes. She is known as a packet to the river pickets; they won't be aware she has changed her trade till she has gone. But meantime to get the cotton collected it is necessary to have a man familiar with the country. On the way down or the return trip, in the distracted state of the region, politically, and its physical aspect as a nearly unexplored wilderness, it would be simply impossible for a stranger to cope with any disasters or difficulties, if one could be found to undertake the trip."

Julius was astonished at himself when he heard his own voice blandly suggest—"Come with [Pg 236] me, Mr. Burrage! You would enjoy the trip—beautiful scenery! I should have the benefit of your long experience in matters of business, and you could avail yourself of my knowledge of the country and the people—the methods and the manners."

He was in admiration of his own astuteness. His intuition had captured the emergency. He had perceived in Mr. Burrage's face unmistakable indications that he would play the obstructive. He would detain the supposed agent here, and would not intrust him with the necessary instructions in this difficult and most compromising business, until the fullest advices could be had from the distant promoters of the enterprise, who were presumed to have sent hither "John Wray, Junior."

The suggestion of Julius met with instantaneous favor among the group, except, indeed, that Mr. Burrage himself looked disconcerted, surprised, definitely at a loss. It removed all possible objections to the employment of this agent with no other credentials than the name on the register—but at this moment Mr. Burrage thought that perhaps the coincidence would have struck him with more force had the name been his own and the registry anticipated his arrival. Time was of importance. No one more than the experienced man of business realizes the Protean capacity for change appertaining to that combination of cause [Pg 237] and effect called opportunity. What is possible to-day may be relegated to the regions of everlasting regret to-morrow. Everything was favorable at the moment, feasible. The future stood with the boon of success in an outstretched hand. Delay was hardly to be contemplated. The proposition that Mr. Burrage should accompany the agent of his own company on a tour of important negotiation, and at no sacrifice of personal ease, was at once so reasonable and so indicative of the fairest intentions that he was ashamed of the cautionary doubt he had entertained. All at once the journey seemed too much trouble. The matter had already been adjusted, he said. The plan might well stand as Mr. Wray had arranged it.

But Mr. Wray, too, added his insistence. "Nothing could be better," he declared.

And as Mr. Burrage demurred, and half apologized, and was distinctly out of countenance, Mr. Wray compassionately overlooked all his disquieting cautions and protested with cordiality that the change would be an advantage. Some difficulty might arise, some reluctance to deliver the cotton they had already purchased, some doubt as to the locality where it was stored,—they used this expression rather than "hidden," though Julius apprehended that its cache was now a cane-brake and now a rock house or cave, and now a tongue of dry land in a network of bayous and swamps,—some failure of facilities in respect [Pg 238] to men or water carriage or land transportation, with all of which this young gentleman, new to the arrangements and the enterprise, might find it difficult to cope successfully. Such unforeseen obstacles might require a divergence from the original plan and the agent's instructions. But Mr. Burrage, a member of the Company, could meet and provide for all these emergencies, and yet with such a guide be as assured and as confident of his footing in this strange country as if he himself were a native. It was the happiest suggestion! It enabled him to make a long arm, as it were, and manipulate the matter in effect without a proxy.

"And meantime it will be strange indeed if I cannot make a long leg!" thought Julius, triumphantly.

The actual Mr. Wray was treated everywhere with all possible consideration and due regard to the fact that he was a British subject. The neutrality of Great Britain was considered exceedingly precarious, and there was no disposition to twist the tail of the Lion, albeit this appendage was whisked about in a way that ever and anon provoked that catastrophe. The British Lion was supposed in some quarters to be solicitous of a grievance which would justify a roar of exceeding wrath. In this instance, however, there was no necessity of withholding the favor asked by a British subject, Mr. John Wray,—for a pass for his cousin, [Pg 239] Mr. John Wray, Junior, of Manchester, England, and his friend, Mr. Alfred Burrage.

That night the two slept on the crowded steamer, as she was to cast off at a very early hour. Long, long did Julius lie awake in his berth in the tiny stateroom peculiar to the architecture of the "stern-wheeler." The good Mr. Burrage in the berth below snored in satisfaction with the events of the day, untroubled as to the morrow. Julius had been so tormented by vacillations, by the untoward "about-face" movements of the probable, so hampered by the unexpected, so repeatedly disappointed, that even now he could not believe in his good fortune. Something, somehow, would snatch the cup from his lips. But in the midst of his turmoil of emotion he had a distinct sense of gratitude that the preservation of his safety had involved no forwarding of equivocal interests. The affairs of the Company were doubtless such as many were seeking to prosecute with varying chances of success. He would report the scheme to his commanding officer, however, and he could forecast the reply, "One of hundreds." But, at all events, the map in his boot-lining was a matter of no slight import. He could hardly wait to spread it on a drumhead before his Colonel's eyes, and solicit the honor of leading the enterprise he had planned.

But was he, indeed, destined to escape, to come off scatheless from this heady venture! [Pg 240]

"If ever I see the command again, by thunder, I'll stick to them as long as I live. If ever I can lay hold of my sword again, I swear my right hand shall never be far from its hilt!"

In the early hours of the night the loading of the cargo was still unfinished. The calls of the deck-hands, the vociferations of the mate, which were of an intensity, a fervor, a mad strenuousness, that might seem never heard before out of Bedlam, the clash and commotion of boxes and barrels, the lowing of cattle and bleating of sheep, for the lower deck was given over to the transportation of army supplies, sounded erratically, now louder, now moderated, dying away and again rising in agitated vibrations. Sometimes, as he lay, a great flare of light illumined the tiny apartment as the torches, carried by the roustabouts on shore, cast eerie vistas into the darkness, and he could see the closely fitted white planking of the ceiling just above his head, the white coverlet, and through the glass door, that served too as window, the railing of the guards without and the dim glimpse of the first street of the town—River Avenue—about on a level with his eye, so deep was the declivity to the wharf.

Quiet came gradually. The grating and shifting of the cargo ceased first; the boat was fully loaded at length. Then the voices became subdued,—once a snatch of song, and again a [Pg 241] burst of laughing banter between the roustabouts going up into the town and the deck-hands about to turn in on the boat. Now it was so quiet that he could distinguish the flow of the current. Yet he could not sleep. Once he seemed near unconsciousness when he heard the clash of iron as the stoker was banking the fires, for steam was up. Then Julius lay in unbroken silence, till an owl hooted from out the Roscoe woods down the river. There was home! He thought of his father with so filial a tenderness that the mere recollection might be accounted a prayer. In that dense mass of foliage off toward the west, under the stars and the moon, stood the silent house, invisible at the distance, but every slant of the roof, every contour of the chimneys, every window and door,—nay, every moulding of the cornice, was as present to his contemplation as if he beheld it in floods of matutinal sunshine. "Oh, bless it!" he breathed. "Bless it, and all it holds!"

With dreary melancholy he fell to gazing out at the real instead,—at the vague slant to the wharf in the flickering moonlight, and the dim warning glow of a lantern on an obstructive

pile of brick on the crest of River Avenue. Somehow the trivial thing had a spell to hold his eyes, as he watched it with a mournful, dull apprehension of what might betide, for he feared to hope still to escape—so often had this hope allured and disappointed him. Would something happen at the last moment—and what would the next disaster be? [Pg 242]

Therefore when he suddenly became sensible that the boat was moving swiftly, strongly, in midcurrent under a full head of steam, he felt a great revulsion of emotion. Floods of sunshine suffused the guards and, shining through the glass section of the door, sent a wakening beam into his face. A glance without apprised him that while he slept the town was left far behind, the fort, the camps, the pickets, all the features of grim-visaged war, and now great forest masses pressed down to the craggy banks on either side. The moment of deliverance was near,—it was at hand,—and as he dressed in the extreme of haste, he listened expectantly for the whistle of the boat, for it was approaching a little town on the opposite side where a landing was always made. Julius hardly feared the entrance of any passenger who might recognize him, but he took his way into the saloon and asked for breakfast, in order that thus employed he might have time to reconnoitre. The boat, however, barely touched the wharf, and when he emerged and joined Mr. Burrage on the deck there was something so breezily triumphant in his manner that the observant elder man looked askance at him with a conscious lack of comprehension. He thought he was evidently mistaken if he had imagined he had gauged this youth. His breeding was far above his humble and subsidiary employment, and his manner singularly well poised and assured. There was a hint of dignity, of command, in his pose and the glance of his eye. He was perfectly courteous; he did not forget to apologize for a lapse of attention, albeit absorbed in a certain undercurrent of excitement. He did not hear what Mr. Burrage had said of the news from the front in the morning paper, and upon its repetition accepted the proffered sheet with thanks and threw himself into a chair beside his elderly fellow-passenger. He had hardly read ten words before he lifted his head with a certain alert expectancy, like the head of a listening deer. The whistle of the boat had sounded again, the hoarse, discordant howl common to river steamers, an acoustic infliction even at a distance, and truly lamentable close at hand, but it was not this that had caught his attention. The boat was turning in midstream and heading for the shore, now backing at the signal of her pilot's bells, peremptorily jangling, now going forward with a jerk, and again swinging slowly around, and at last slipping forward easily toward the wood-yard where great piles of ready-cut fuel awaited her. [Pg 243]

An alien sound had also caught Mr. Burrage's attention.

"What is that?" he demanded of the captain of the steamboat, who held a field-glass and was looking eagerly toward the woods.

"Musketry," replied the captain, succinctly. [Pg 244]

"There is some engagement taking place in the forest?" inquired Mr. Burrage.

"Seems so," said the captain.

"And are you—are you going to land?"

"Must have wood—that's my regular depot," returned the steamboatman.

"You had best return to Roanoke City instead," urged Mr. Burrage, aghast.

"Need wood for *that*!"

"But the boat will be captured by the Rebels. Why don't you burn the freight?"

"Beeves ain't convenient for fuel on the hoof."

"Oh, I reckon the captain can wood and get off," said Julius, good-naturedly, reassuring Mr. Burrage. "Nobody is thinking about this boat now." Then, as a sharper volley smote the air, he added, "I think I'll look into this a bit," rose and took his way through the groups of excited passengers and down to the lower deck.

The "mud clerk," the roustabouts, the wood-yard contingent, made quick work of fuelling the steamer, and she was once more in midstream, forging ahead at high speed, before it occurred to Mr. Burrage to compare notes with his young colleague and ascertain if he had learned aught of what forces were engaged.

He was not easily found, and Mr. Burrage asked the captain of his whereabouts.

"He must have got left by the boat," said the captain, as if the packet were a sentient thing and subject to whims. [Pg 245]

Mr. Burrage, gravely disturbed, caused inquiry to be circulated among the hands and officials,—all, in effect, who had set foot on *terra firma*.

"Who? that young dandy with the long hair?" said the "mud clerk," staring, his measuring staff still in his hand. "Why, that man *intended* to land. He had his portmanteau and walked off along the road as unconcerned as if he was going home. I was too busy measuring the wood to pass the time of day, thinking the riverbank was alive with guerillas."

His departure remained a mystery to Mr. Burrage. As to the topographical features of his

involved scheme he was powerless to prosecute this phase alone. The simple expedient of sticking to the packet and retracing his way on her return trip brought him at last to a consultation with his *confrères*, who also long pondered fruitlessly on the strange meeting and its result. About this time the agent or guide, provided by the Company, presented himself with due credentials from the main office,—a heavy, dull, somewhat sullen man, with no further capacity, or will, indeed, than a lenient interpretation of his duty might require.

"I always shall think," Mr. Wray used to say, "that we suffered a great loss in that young man —that John Wray, Junior."

CHAPTER XIII

[Pg 246]

In these days the picket lines were seldom stationary; one or the other faction continually drew in close these outlying guards, as if by presentiment,—an unexplained monition of caution, or perhaps because of some vague rumor of danger. Now and again, by a sudden belligerent impulse, they were impetuously attacked and driven in; but apparently in pursuance of no definite plan of aggression emanating from the main body. A few days of surly silence and stillness would ensue, and then the opposing force would return the warlike compliment with interest, holding the enemy's ground and kindling bivouac fires from the embers they had left. It seemed a sort of game of tag—a grim game; for the loss of life in these futile manœuvres amounted to far more in the long run than the few casualties in each skirmish might indicate. Sometimes these feints were entirely relinquished, and intervals of absolute inaction continued so long that it might seem a matter of doubt why the two lines were there at all, with so vague a similitude of war. Occasionally they lay so near
[Pg 247]
that the individual soldiers, forgetful of sectional enmity, gave rein to mere human interest in the opportunities afforded by a common tongue and an apprehended and familiar range of feeling. A lot of tobacco, thrown into a group about a bivouac fire by an unseen hand one night, brought the next night a package of "hard tack" from over the way. Now and again long-range conversations were held, full of kindly curiosity, or humorously abusive, the questionable wit of which mightily rejoiced the heart of the lonely sentinel, and upon his relief all the jokes were duly rehearsed when once more in camp, he himself, of course, represented as coming off winner in the wordy war, being able to appropriate all the good things said by the enemy. The loud, cheerful, "Say, air you the galoot ez wuz swapping lies with Ben Smith day 'fore yestiddy?" and the response, "Smith, *Smith*, you say. I dis-remember the name. I guess I never heard it afore!" all were much more commendable from a merely humanitarian point of view than the singing of the minié ball or the hissing shriek of a shell that had been wont to intrude on the bland quietude of the sweet spring air.

Thus it was that Miss Mildred Fisher, accompanied by Lieutenant Seymour and one of her father's ancient friends, Colonel Monette, himself attended by a very smart orderly, riding out of Roanoke City down the long turnpike road, saw naught that might indicate active
[Pg 248]
hostilities. The picturesque tents in the distance about the town, the outline of the forts against the blue sky, and afar off a gunboat in the river, were all still, all silent, all as suave as the painted incident of a picture on the wall. The turnpike itself bore heavy tokens of the war in the deeply worn holes and wheel tracks of the great wagon and artillery trains, wrought during the wet weather of the winter. It was hard going on the horses, and precluded that brisk pace and easy motion which are essential to the pleasure of the equestrian. Mildred Fisher, indeed, delighted in a breakneck speed, and it may be doubted whether it was altogether a happy animal which had the honor of bearing her light weight. As they reached a "cut off," where a "dirt road" had been recently repaired and put into fine condition to obviate the obstacles of the main travelled way, Miss Fisher proposed that they should "let the horses out" along this detour for a bit. Then she challenged the two officers for a race.

They could but accede, and indeed it would have been difficult to deny her aught. The elder looked at her with an almost paternal pride, the other with a sort of surly adoration, tempered by many a grievance and many a realized imperfection in his idol, and a spirit of revolt against the sunny whims and again the cold caprice which he and others sustained at her hands. Seymour had little to complain of just now; yet, if she smiled on him and his heart
[Pg 249]
warmed to the sunshine of her eyes, the next moment he was saying to himself that it meant nothing, it was not for his sake; for she was smiling with the same degree of brightness on that whiskerando, the elderly colonel. Her face was exquisitely fair, and in horseback exercise—the luxury she loved—she tolerated no veil to protect the perfection of her complexion. Her fluffy red hair had a sheen rather like gold, because of the contrast with her damson-tinted cloth riding-habit. The hat was of the low-crowned style then worn with a feather, and this was a long ostrich plume of the same damson tint, curling down over her hair, and shading to a lighter purple. Her hazel eyes were full of joy like a child's. Her mouth was not closed for a moment,—its red lips emitting disconnected exclamations, laughter, gay banter, and sometimes just held apart, silently taking the swift rush of the air, showing the

rows of even white teeth and a glimpse of the deeper red of the interior, like the heart of a crimson flower.

She tore along like the wind itself. "Madcap," who had raced before, and, sooth to say, with more numerous spectators, had thrust his head forward, striking out a long stride, and the soft, elastic, dirt road fairly flew beneath his compact hoofs. The skirt of the riding-habit—much longer than in the later fashions—floated out in the breeze of the flight, and Colonel Monette, who did not really approve outdoor sports for women, expected momently to see it [Pg 250] catch in a thorn tree of the thickets that lined the road, or on some stake of the fragments of a ridered rail fence, and tear her from the saddle. Then, her foot being held by the stirrup perhaps, she might be dragged by Madcap or brained by one blow of the ironshod hoofs. Thus his heart was in his mouth, and he was eminently appreciative of the folly of the elderly wight who seeks to share the pleasures of the young.

The lieutenant, being young himself, was not so cautiously and altruistically apprehensive. He admired Miss Fisher's dash and courage and buoyant spirit of enjoyment, and, having a good horse, he pressed Madcap to his best devoir. Colonel Monette, to keep them in sight at all, was compelled to make very good speed, and went galloping and plunging down the road in a wild and reckless manner.

It was the elder officer who was first visited by compunctions in behalf of the horses.

"Halt!" he cried. "Halt! Miss Fisher is the winner—as she always is! Halt! Lieutenant Seymour!" Then in a lower voice when he could be heard to speak, "We shall have the horses badly blown," he said with an admonitory cadence, which reminded Seymour that a military man's whole duty does not consist in scampering after a harum-scarum girl in a race with two wild young horses.

Seeing that she was not followed, Miss Fisher reined in after several wild plunges from [Pg 251] Madcap, who felt that he had not had his run half out, and snorted with much surprise in his full bright eyes as, turning in the road, he saw the two mounted officers far behind, stationary and waiting. The victor should never be unduly elated, but Madcap expressed his glee of triumph chiefly in his heels, curvetting and prancing, presently kicking up so uncontrollably, the excitement of the contest, the joy of racing, still surging in his veins and tense in his muscles, that the officers might well have feared some disaster to the girl. They at once put their steeds in motion to go to her assistance, but Madcap, with outstretched head, viewing their start, suddenly made a bounding *volte-face* in the road, and with the bit between his teeth set out at a pace that discounted his former efforts and carried him out of sight in a few minutes.

Miss Fisher, with all the courage of the red-headed Fisher family, albeit she had become pale and breathless, settled herself firmly in the saddle, held the reins in close, now and then essaying a sharp jerk, first with the right then quickly with the left hand—and it was as much as she could do to keep the saddle at these moments—to displace the grasp of his teeth on the bit. For a time these manœuvres failed, but at last the road became rougher, brambles appeared in its midst, the intention of repair had evidently ceased, and running at [Pg 252] full tilt was no longer any great fun. The horse voluntarily slowed his pace, and the sudden jerk right and left snatched the bit from his teeth. He might still have pranced and curvetted, for the spirit of speed was not satiated, but his foot slipped on the uneven gullied ground, he stumbled, and being a town horse and seeing nowhere any promise of a good road, he resigned himself to the guidance of his rider, thinking perhaps she knew more of the country than he.

While she breathed him for a time, she looked about her along the curves of the road, seeing nothing of her companions, and realizing that she was quite alone. This gave her a sentiment of uneasiness for a moment; then she reflected that her friends were doubtless riding forward to overtake her. She drew up the reins, intending to turn, and, retracing her way, to meet them.

The place was all unfamiliar. So swift had been her transit that she had not had a moment's contemplation of the surroundings. She stood at the summit of a gentle slope and could look off toward stretches of forest, here and there interspersed with considerable acreage of cleared ground, evidently formerly farm land, now abandoned in the stress of war and the presence of contending armies. The correctness of this conclusion was confirmed by the sight of two gaunt chimneys at no great distance, between which lay a mass of charred [Pg 253] timbers,—once the dwelling, now burned to the ground. The scene was an epitome of desolation, despite the sunshine, which indeed here was but a lonely splendor; despite the brilliance of the trumpet vine, tangled in remnants of the fence, in many a bush, and swaying in long lengths, its scarlet bugles flaring, from the boughs of overshadowing trees; despite the appeal of the elder blossoms of creamy, lacelike delicacy, catching her eye in the thickets, which were so lush, so green, so favored by the rich earth and the prodigal season. She was sensible of a clutch of dread on that merry spirit of hers before she heard a sound—a significant sound that stilled the pulsations of her heart and sent her blood cold. It was the unmistakable sinister sibilance of a shell. She saw the tiny white puff rise up above the forest, skim through the air, drop among the thickets, and then she heard the detonation of an explosion. Before she could draw her breath there came a sudden volley of musketry at a distance,—she knew that for the demonstration of regular soldiers, firing at the word,—then ensued another, and again only a patter of dropping shots. She wondered that her

companions did not overtake her—she must find them—she must rejoin them,—when suddenly an object started up from the side of the road, the sight of which palsied her every [Pg 254] muscle. A man it was who had lain in the bushes on the hillside, a man so covered with blood that he had lost every semblance of humanity. The blood still came in a steady stream from his mouth, impelled in jets, as if it were under the impulse of a pump, and he held his hand to his stomach, whence too there came blood, dripping down from his fingers. In sickened, aghast dismay she watched his approach, and as he passed she found her voice and called to him to stop,—might she not help him stanch his wounds? His staring eyes gazed vacantly forward with no recognition of the meaning of her words, and he walked deliriously on, every step sending the blood forward, draining the vital currents to exhaustion. Now she dared not turn, she could not pass that hideous apparition. She shuddered and trembled and rode irresolutely forward, just to be moving—hardly with a realized intention. Suddenly the road curved, and the scene of the conflict was before her.

The woods were dense on three sides of a wide stretch of fields that were springing green with new verdure; a portion had even been ploughed and bedded up for cotton; here and there lay strange objects in curious attitudes, which she did not at once recognize as slain men. Among them were scattered carbines, horses already dead, and more than one in scrambling agonies of dying. In the farthest vista field-guns were evidently getting in [Pg 255] battery, ready to sweep from the earth a little force of dismounted cavalrymen who had come to close quarters with infantry and who were fighting on foot with carbines. The minié balls now and then sang sharply in the air, and in the excitement she did not realize the danger. Suddenly a puff of smoke rose from the battery, the shell winging its way high above the infantry line and at last falling among the dismounted cavalrymen, who, perceiving the situation to be hopeless, wavered, sought to rally, and at last broke and ran to the horse-holders hidden in the thickets. Thither the shells pursued them, bursting all along the plain, and as Mildred Fisher gazed she saw three men on the field, powerless to reach the shelter. One was wounded,—an officer, evidently,—and the other two were seeking to support him to his horse hard by. At this moment a fragment of shell killed the animal before their eyes.

"Ride out! Ride out!" cried Millie Fisher to a horse-holder that she observed close by in the woods. He was mounted himself, and he held the bridles of three horses. He looked half bewildered, pale, disabled. A shell burst prematurely, out of range and wide of aim, high in the air above their heads.

"I can't," he said; "I'm hit!"

"Give *me* the line, then!" she cried.

He was past reasoning, beyond surprise, stunned by the clamors and succumbing to wounds.

The next moment, the three great horses in a leash, Madcap led his wildest chase across [Pg 256] that stricken plain, now shying aside as some wounded man lifted a ghastly face almost beneath his hoofs, or pitifully sought to crawl away like a maimed and dying beast. The thunder of the frenzied gallop shook the ground; the group of men, for whom the rescue was designed, turned a startled and amazed gaze as the horses came on abreast, snorting and neighing and with tossing manes and wild eyes, rushing like the steeds of Automedon.

"The gallant little game-cock!" exclaimed Jim Fisher, eying the supposed horse-holder from beside the smoking guns of his battery in the distance. "Now, I'm glad to spare him if never another man goes clear!"

For the Confederate cavalry were starting out in pursuit, and to let the squadrons pass without danger the cannonade was discontinued. The bugle's mandate, "Cease firing!" rose lilting into the air, and there was sudden silence among the guns. As Captain Fisher disengaged the strap of his field-glass seeking to adjust it, he noted that there was something continually flying out at the side of the young soldier's saddle. One glance through the magnifying lenses at the floating folds of the riding-habit and the radiant face crowned by the purple plume—and Jim Fisher almost fell under the wheel of the limber as it was run up to the gun-carriage. "My God, Watt!" he exclaimed to his first lieutenant who [Pg 257] was also his brother, "that—that—cavalryman is—is Sister Millie!"

When she was at last with them, for in tumultuous agitation they had rushed forward to meet her, beckoning and shouting, and their kisses had smeared the gunpowder from their grim countenances to her lovely roseate cheeks, they began to experience the reactionary effects of their fright and scolded her with great rancor, declaring repeatedly they felt much disposed, even yet, to slap her. All of which had no effect at all on Millie Fisher. They tried æsthetic methods of reducing her to see her deed from their standpoint.

"I thought you were a patriotic girl, Sister," one of them urged. "And see, now—you have helped three Yankees to escape!"

"I *am* patriotic—more patriotic than anybody," she asseverated. "But I forgot they were Yankees—they were just three men in great danger!"

"But *you* were in great danger, Sister, I—I—might have shot you!"

"Didn't you feel funny when you found out who 'twas?" she queried with a giggle of great zest.

"I felt mighty funny," said Jim Fisher, grimly. "I suppose few men have ever felt so funny!"

Few men have ever looked less funny than he as he reflected on the episode. He recovered his equanimity only gradually, but especially after he had been able to make arrangements to convey intelligence to his mother within the Federal lines as to his sister's safety. This was rendered possible by a flag of truce sent out almost immediately by Colonel Monette, who with Lieutenant Seymour was in the greatest anxiety as to her fate, feeling a sense of responsibility in the matter. She insisted on adding a line addressed to the younger officer, bidding him sing daily with his hand on his heart:— [Pg 258]

"'Would I were with thee!'—*In the Confederate lines!*"

if he expected her to conserve any faith in his constancy.

That evening Jim Fisher almost regained his wonted cheerfulness. The other four brothers had gathered together to welcome the unexpected guest, and as they sat around a great wood fire in an old deserted farm-house, a primitive structure built of logs, with Millie and the youngest, favorite brother, Walter, in the centre, it seemed so joyful a reunion that he was almost tempted to forgive the manner in which it had come about.

Jim Fisher's body-servant, Cæsar, cooked a supper for them, in a room across an open passage, consisting of corn-bread, bean-coffee, bacon, and a chicken, which last came as a miracle, as he mysteriously expressed it, upon inquiry—"as de mussy ob Providence!" Cæsar was a brisk young darkey, with a capacity for a sullen and lowering change, and with a great distaste for ridicule, induced by much suffering as the butt of the practical jokes of his young masters, for among so many Fisher boys one or another must needs be always disposed for mirth. [Pg 259]

"You needn't ax me so p'inted 'bout dat chicken's pedigree, Marse Watt," Cæsar was beguiled into retorting acrimoniously. "Naw, sah. I dunno. I dunno whedder hit's Dominicky or Shanghai. An' *ye* have no call to know whedder hit's foreign or native! *I* tell you hit's fried—an' dat's all I'm *gwine* ter tell you!—fried ter a turn! An' if you bed enny religion, you'd say grace, an' give Miss Millie a piece while it's hot. Naw, sah! naw, Marse Watt! I *ain't* no robber! Marse Jim—you hear what Marse Watt done call me! Naw, sah! I don't expec' ter see Satan!—not *dis week*, nohow."

Cæsar was glad to gather up the fragments and make off to the kitchen opposite, where he sat before the fire and crunched the last bone of the precious fowl, and grinned over the adroit methods of its capture on this great occasion, for such a luxury could hardly be bought at any price, in Confederate money or any other currency.

After supper was despatched something of a levee was held; so many of Miss Millie Fisher's old friends—officers in the military force—called to renew the acquaintance of happier times. And as she recognized the more intimate old playfellows or neighbors, with a gush of delighted little screams and a musical acclaim of their Christian names, sometimes an old half-forgotten nickname, other guests, later acquaintances, were envious and wistful, and sought to stem the tide of reminiscence, the "Don't you remembers" and "Oh-h-h, wasn't it funny?" and to impress the values of the present, despite the lures of the past. [Pg 260]

She was delightfully gracious and gay with them all, and perhaps she had never seemed more lovely than the flicker of the firelight revealed her, for there were no other means of illumination. She stood to receive in the centre of the floor, radiant in her dark purple riding-habit and hat, the military figures, all in full uniform, clustering about her, some resting on their swords, some half leaning on a comrade's shoulder, while jest and repartee went around, the laughter now and again making the rafters ring. It was with reluctance that they gradually tore themselves away in obedience to a realization that after so long a separation the family might desire to spend the evening alone, for three of the brothers must needs repair to their own command at some distance at break of day, and it might be long before they could all be together once more.

So at last, the visitors gone, the door barred, the night wearing on, the Fishers gathered round the replenished fire, for the air was chill and the warmth was as welcome as the light. The deserted house was entirely bare of furniture, and as the force was a "flying column," flung forward without the impediments of baggage trains or tents, there was not even a camp-stool available. Millie and Watt sat side by side on a billet of wood, their arms around each other's waists to preserve the equilibrium, and the rest of the brothers half reclined on the saddles on the floor. And every face was smiling, and every head was red. Again and again a shout of laughter went up, as she detailed the news of the town,—and some very queer things, indeed, she told,—and Watt, the lieutenant, responded with the news of the battery and the camp. [Pg 261]

Perhaps he felt that his prestige as a wit was threatened, for once he said, "I'd give a hundred dollars, Sister, to be assured that all you are telling is the truth."

"I wouldn't give a brass thimble to be assured that all *you* are telling is the truth, for I know 'tisn't!" retorted Millie.

"Oh, I meant in Confederate money!" He lowered the face value of his bid.

They kept late hours that night; but at last, when the fire was burning low and great masses

of coals had accumulated, they swung a military cloak hammock-wise across a corner of a little inner room, hardly more than a cupboard, and this Millie Fisher in her new rôle as a campaigner found a comfortable bed enough. The restricted apartment had no window, and no door save the one opening into the larger room; and this she set ajar, making Walter place a great solid shot against it lest it close, declaring that if that catastrophe should supervene, she should die of solitary fright. The five Fisher brothers were well within call and sight, as they clustered around the embers, talking for a time in low voices of what had chanced in the interval of their separation. For only Jim and Watt were together in the same company. They commented on the relative cost and value of their *chaussure*, as they stretched out their long, booted legs, with their feet on the hearth, and compared the wearing qualities of the soles and upper leather. They looked kindly into each other's faces and laughed as they made a point, and between the two younger brothers, Watt and Lucien, there was a disposition to horse-play, manifested in unexpected tweaks, that each was glad to receive as a compliment, so did separation and the sense of an imminent and ever environing danger soften and make tender their fraternal sentiment. But first one, then another, flung his cloak around him and, pillowing his head on his saddle, lay down to rest, the two younger brothers the last of all.

[Pg 262]

And now—silence. The dull red light of the embers gloomed on the daubed and chinked walls of the old log house, with its rude puncheon floor. The five prostrate, cloaked figures upon it were still, asleep. Here and there from amongst the arms, placed ready to seize at a moment's notice, came a keen steely gleam. Mildred could hear the sentry's tread outside up and down before the door. Once, far away, she noted the measured tramp of marching feet, then a challenge, and anon, "Stand! Grand Rounds! Advance, Sergeant, with the countersign!" and presently the march was resumed in the distance. And again—silence! Only the wind astir in the forest, only the rustle of the lush foliage. All—how different from her dainty bedroom where she had spent last night, the downy couch, the silken coverlet, the velvet carpet, the lace curtains, the tremulous flicker of the wind in the flower-stand on the balcony!

[Pg 263]

"Hugh!" she said suddenly.

Every red head on the floor had lifted at the sound, and every hand had clutched a weapon.

"What's the matter, Sister?"

"I—I—believe there must be a flying squirrel or—or—something in the wall. Don't they build in old walls? I've seen that in some book."

Jim and Hugh arose and investigated the wall of the inner room by means of a torch of light-wood.

"Why, Sister, it is as solid as a rock!" Jim asseverated. "There's no flying squirrel here."

He extinguished the flaming torch in the ashes banked in the chimney-place in the larger room, and again the two brothers laid themselves down to rest, with their feet on the hearth.

[Pg 264]

Once more the silence of the night, the vague crumbling of the ash, the measured sound of the sentry's tread. There was no echo of the passing of time—but how leaden-footed! How slowly fared the night! How motionless lay those cloaked figures, each with his head on his saddle!

"Watt," her voice came plaintively out of the gloom. "I'm scared!"

This time, though all stirred, they did not rise.

"Pshaw! Scared of what?"

She did not answer. Only after a time she queried irrelevantly, "Can mice climb?"

"Did you see that in a book, too?" asked Watt.

"They can only climb under certain conditions," opined Hugh, sleepily.

"But they'd scorn to intrude on a lady in a hammock, Sister," declared George.

"Oh, hush, George!" said Jim, authoritatively. "No mouse can get up there, Sister. Why don't you go to sleep?"

"I can't," said Millie Fisher, plaintively. "I saw so many awful things to-day!"

"You had better think about mice," said Watt, quickly, to effect a diversion. "They are minute, but monstrous. Just imagine how one could scale the wall, and taking its tail under its left arm spring across to your hammock, and run along, say, the nape of your neck! Oh-h-h! wouldn't that be just *aw-w-wful*!"

[Pg 265]

"Oh, hush, Watt!" said Jim. "Just compose your mind, Sister. Shut your eyes and think about nothing."

"Think how nearly you scared a gallant captain of artillery out of his seven senses to-day," suggested Watt, anew. "I thought Jim would get run over by the gun-carriages and the caissons, whether or no. He was so scatter-brained, and white, and wild-eyed, and

blundering—nearly under the horses' feet."

Millie Fisher gave a pleased little laugh.

"Was he? Was he, truly?"

"He was, for a fact. Few captains of artillery have the opportunity to make their own sister a target in a regular knock-down-and-drag-out fight. I thought I was going to have to support the gentleman off the field of battle. He couldn't stand up for a while."

"How funny!" exclaimed Millie Fisher, delightedly. "Just *too* funny."

She shifted her position in the hammock, closed her eyes, and when she opened them again the sun was flaring into the open door and window of the large room, and all the five Fisher brothers were up and fully accoutred for the duty of the service, and she was requested to get out of the hammock that it might again be turned into a cloak.

[Pg 266] The details of her exploit were brought back to the main body of the Federal army and bruited abroad by the men whom she had rescued from death or capture. One of these, the officer, was much disposed to vaunt his gratitude and sense of obligation, and as Miss Millie Fisher was as well known as the river itself, the incident created no small stir in many different circles. The girl was held to be a prodigy of courage. All the men of the family were known to be brave, eke to say, fractious. There had been seldom a row of any sort, in several generations, in which a Fisher's red head had not been in the thick of it, and held high. There were several who were now men of mark, but never had aught else so appealed to their pulse of pride, their close bond of union in family ties and clannish affection for which they were noted. Great were the boastings of the Fisher brothers, each feeling that he shone by reflected light, and echoes of their vain-glorious brag were borne to the storm centre by that mysterious means of communication known as the Grape-vine Telegraph.

[Pg 267] One day Seymour detailed, with a touch of bitter sarcasm, the rumor that Jim Fisher had declared that Sister Millie could stampede the whole Yankee army if she had the chance. With his customary bluntness Seymour had broached the subject on a hospitable occasion, in a group both of officers and civilians. The latter said nothing, leaving it to the comrades of the men who had benefited by her hair-brained bravery and dashing equestrianism to controvert the hyperbole. But Ashley's tact was so rooted in good nature that it was difficult to take him amiss. He could not say, he declared, whether she could stampede the army, but he could testify that she had captured it.

The Grape-vine was shortly burdened with other rumors that were of far more import to Seymour, who was of a serious mind, and of an exacting, not to say, petulant, temper. These traits had been intensified by his recent subjection to the whims and caprices of a coquette of exceptional capacity, for his feelings were deeply involved. He was truly in love, and all his dearest interests hung on the uncertain telegraphy of the Grape-vine. It was an unhappy time for him, when he doubted in a rush of hope, and again believed sunk in the despondency of absolute despair, having almost as much foundation for the one as the other, the reports of her marriage to Lawrence Lloyd.

This time the Grape-vine had proved a reliable medium of information. Colonel Lloyd had sought and secured leave of absence long enough to ride fifty miles across country to greet her as soon as he had heard she was within the Confederacy. When her father joined the family party Colonel Lloyd laid siege for his consent to an immediate marriage.

They had long been engaged, he urged.

[Pg 268] "I had almost forgotten that," Millie interpolated. She had promised her assistance in the persuasion of her father, and thus she fulfilled her pledge.

"There is no reason for further delay," Lloyd insisted.

"I *have* been a *débutante* these—four—years!" she suggested demurely.

Lloyd submitted that he hoped there were no objections to him in Colonel Fisher's estimation.

"Except such as are insuperable—you'll never be any better," suggested Millie.

It would be undesirable, even dangerous, Lloyd argued, to send her back to her home in Roanoke City with a flag of truce in the present state of conflict.

"But it is not at all dull there—" she interrupted vivaciously. "Some very nice Yankee officers are in society there—several old friends of yours, papa. Colonel Monette and Lieutenant-Colonel Blake of the regular army—old classmates of yours. And some others whom you don't know—Captain Baynell, who is *very* handsome, and Colonel Ashley—he belongs to the volunteers; he is most agreeable and highly thought of, and oh—of course Lieutenant Seymour—oh, it is *not* dull there!"

[Pg 269] Lloyd looked at her in blank dismay, and the blank dismay on the face of her father was nearly as marked, but the latter's anxiety was due to a different cause—what would his wife decide if she were here!—for every one who knew the Fishers was well aware that Guy Fisher, albeit a man of much force in his own domain of business or military life, "sung

mighty small" in all matters in which his wife had concern.

Lloyd rallied to the attack and continued to explain that he had orders detaching him, showing that he would be stationary, in command of a fort in the far South for some time, and that Millie would be in a position to be comfortable.

"But can I ride horseback there?" she stipulated. "I have just found out what I can do in that line!"

She liked to describe this conversation afterward. Her lover was the most serious and literal-minded of men, anxious and doubtful, and her father the prey of vacillation and indecision. They looked alternately at her and at each other with an expression of startled bewilderment as she spoke, seeking to adjust what she had said with their own knowledge of the facts.

The flying column was once more in motion, and one evening, after a considerable distance southward had been accomplished, the leave both of Colonel Fisher and Colonel Lloyd being close upon expiration and decision exigent, the doubting, anxious father gave his consent.

The young people were married like campaigners under a tree in a beautiful magnolia grove, the rhododendron blooming everywhere in the woods and the mocking-birds in full song. Colonel Lloyd was in uniform, armed and spurred, Miss Fisher in her hat and riding-habit, [Pg 270] which last she wore with peculiar elegance; as the skirts of the day were of great length, the superfluous folds were caught up and carried over one arm, and it was said she had attained her graceful proficiency in this art, which was esteemed of much difficulty, by constant practice before the long mirror in her wardrobe at home. She used to tell afterward of the beautiful site, the velvet turf, the magnolia blooms, the rhododendron blossoms, the singing mocking-birds. Then she would enumerate the brilliant martial assemblage that witnessed the ceremony, the men of high rank in full uniform; the wives of a number of them—refugees in the Confederacy "seeking for a home," as the sardonically humorous song of that day phrased it—also graced the occasion. Her father and brothers, all the six Fisher men, were present, and she used to say, with the tone of an after-thought, but with a glint of mischief in her eye, "*And* Colonel Lloyd—*he* was there, too!"

There, but hardly up to the standard. He was a man whose courage had been of especial note, even in those days when bravery seemed the rule. He had had, too, exceptional opportunities to display his mettle. But on this occasion his terror was so palpable that he trembled perceptibly; he was pale and agitated; he fumbled for the ring and occasioned a general fear that he might let it fall—altogether furnishing an admirable exhibition of the [Pg 271] stage fright usual with bridegrooms.

All these details did she observe and recollect and even his gravity would relax as she rehearsed them in after years. It was considered one of the evidences of her incurable frivolity that she seemed to care nothing for that momentous incident of her experience in those days, hardly to remember it,—the exploit by which she had saved the lives of three men, sore harassed and beset; but she found endless source of interest in the reminiscence of trifles such as the incongruous aspect of the chaplain who officiated at the wedding ceremony, with his spurs showing on his reverend heels beneath his surplice, and the brass buttons on his sleeves as he lifted his hands in benediction,—which afforded her a glee of retrospect.

CHAPTER XIV

[Pg 272]

After the escape of Julius Roscoe time held to a tranquil pace in the placidities of the storm centre. The rose-red dawns burst into bloom and the days flowered whitely, full of fragrance and singing birds, of loitering sunshine and light-winged breezes. One by one the still noons glowed and glistered, expanding into summer radiance, and dulled gradually to the mellow splendors of the sunset. Then fell the serene dusk, blue on the far-away mountains, violet nearer at hand, with a white star in the sky, and a bugle's strain leaping into the air like a thing of life, a vivified sound. And all the panorama of troops, and forts, and camps, and cannon might be some magnificent military spectacle, so remote seemed the war—so unreal. Every morning the "ladies" wrought at their lessons in the library, and Leonora cut their small summer garments and helped the seamstress, who came in by the day, to sew. Despite these absorptions Mrs. Gwynn managed to find leisure to read aloud to Judge Roscoe his favorite old novels, and essays, and dull antiquated histories. She evolved subjects of controversy on which to argue with him, and was facetious and found occasion to call him [Pg 273] "Your Honour" oftener than heretofore. For he had grown old suddenly; his step had lost its elasticity; he looked up a cane that had once been presented to him by some fraternity; his hair was turning white and—worst sign of all—he was not sorry to be approaching the end.

"The night is long, and the day is a burden," he once said.

Then, when she reminded him of duty, he recanted. But he had obviously fallen into that

indifference to life incident to advancing age, and was sensible of a not involuntary gravitation toward the tomb. Later he asked her if she did not think those lines of Stephen Hawes's had a most mellow and languorous cadence,—

"For though the day appear ever so long,
At last the bell ringeth to even-song."

He showed great anxiety concerning Captain Baynell's recovery, but he had never mentioned to her the fact of Julius's presence in the house. She knew that he and probably old Ephraim had been aware of it, but this was only a constructive knowledge on her part, and founded on no assurance. When once more Baynell was able to come downstairs, she perceived that he himself had no remote consciousness of his assailant. He had entirely accepted the theory of a fall instead of a collision, and was only a little deprecatory and embarrassed at being so long in getting himself away.

"Positively my last appearance!" He was reduced even to the hackneyed phrase. [Pg 274]

Mrs. Gwynn made the conventional polite protest, and the "ladies" joyously and affectionately flocked around him, and his heart expanded to the grave kindness of his host. Nevertheless he appreciated a subtle change. Despite the enhancing charm of the season, which even a few days had wrought to a deeper perfection, the place had somehow fallen under a tinge of gloom. But the roses were blooming at the windows, the lilies stood in ranks, tall and stately, in the borders, the humming-birds were rioting all day in the honeysuckle vines over the rear galleries and the side porch, the breeze swept back and forth through the dim, perfumed, wide spaces of the house, which seemed expanded, with all the doors open. Sometimes he attributed the change to the tempered light, for all the trees were in full leaf, and the deeply umbrageous boughs transmitted scarce a beam to the windows, once so sunny; much of the time, too, the shutters were partially closed. And though the children flitted about like little fairies, in their thin white dresses, and Mrs. Gwynn, garbed, too, in white, seemed, with her floating draperies, in the transparent green twilight, like some ethereal dream of youth and beauty, there was a pervasive sense of despondency, of domestic discomfort, of impending disaster. Sometimes he attributed the change to one or two untoward chances, a revelation of the real character of war that [Pg 275] happened to be presented to the observation of the household. The "ladies" came clamoring in one day, all wide-eyed and half distraught. With that relish of horror characteristic of ignorance, a negro woman, a visitor of Aunt Chaney's, had detailed to them the sentence of a soldier to be shot for some military crime—shot, as he knelt on his own coffin. Presently they heard the music of the band playing a funeral march along the turnpike as the poor wretch was taken out with a detail from the city limits; then, only the drum, a terrible sound, a dull, muffled thud, at intervals, that barely timed the marching footfall, while the victim was in the midst! And still the vibration of the mournful drum, seeking out every responsive nerve of terror within the shuddering children!

Their painful, tearless cries, their clinging hands, their frantic appeals for help for the doomed creature—would no one help him!—were most pathetic.

And though Leonora could shut the windows and gravely explain, then tell a story and divert the moment,—they were so young, so plastic, so trustful,—no ingenuity could find a satisfactory method to account for the anti-climax of the tragedy, when within the hour came the same detail, marching briskly back along the turnpike, with fife and drum playing a waggish tune. The wide, daunted eyes of the children, their paling cheeks, their breathless [Pg 276] silence, annotated the lesson in brutality, in the essential heartlessness of the world, except for the tutored graces of a cultivated philanthropy. For a long time one or the other would wake in the night to cry out that she heard the muffled drum,—they were taking the man out to shoot him, kneeling on his coffin,—and again and again would come the plaintive query, "And is nobody, *nobody* sorry?"

The incident passed with the events of the crowded time, but even within the domestic periphery harmony had ceased to reign as of yore. Old Ephraim was a bit sullen, gloomy, did his work with an ill grace, and repudiated all acquaintance with "Brer Rabbit" and "Brer Fox." The soldiers in the neighboring camps—possibly to secure an influence, his alienation from the interest of his quasi-owner, in order to ferret out more of the mystery concerning the Confederate officer, possibly only animated by political fervor, and it may be with a spice of mischief, finding amusement in the old negro's garrulous grotesqueries—had been talking to him of slavery, making the most of his grievances, setting them in order before him, and urging him to rouse himself to the great opportunities of freedom.

"I done make up my mind," he said autocratically, one day in the kitchen. "I gwine realize on my forty acres an' a muel!"

For this substantial bonanza freedom was supposed to confer on each ex-slave. [Pg 277]

"Forty acres an' a mule!" the old cook echoed in derisive incredulity and with a scornful black face. "You *done* realize on de mule—a mule is whut you is, sure! Here's yer mule! An' now you go out an' fotch me a pail of water, else I'll make ye realize on enough good land ter kiver ye! Dat's whut! It'll be six feet—not forty acres,—but it kin do yer job!"

He might have made a fractious politician but for this adverse influence, for he had the variant moods of a mercurial nature, and in gloom showed a morose perversity that could

have been easily manipulated into a spurious sense of martyrdom, lacking a tutored ratiocination to enable him to discriminate the facts. But despite his failings, his ignorance, the bewildering changes in his surroundings, never a word concerning his young master escaped his lips, never an inadvertent allusion, a disastrous whisper. He scarcely allowed himself a thought, a speculation.

"Fust thing I know," he reflected warily, "I'll be talkin' ter myself. They always tole me dat walls had ears!"

A day or two of murky weather seemed to penetrate the mental atmosphere as well. It was perhaps the inauguration of the chill interval known as "blackberry winter." Everywhere the great brambles were snowy with bloom, and in the house the "ladies" shivered and clasped [Pg 278] their cold elbows in the sleeves of their thin summer dresses till the fenders and fire-dogs were brought out once more, and the flicker of hearthstone flames made cheery the aspect of the library, and dispensed a genial warmth. The air was moist; the trains ran with a dull roar and an undertone of reverberation; there was a collision of boats in the fog on the river, involving loss of life, and one night, the window being up, the sentry in passing called Captain Baynell out on the portico. He said he hesitated to summon the corporal of the guard, lest the sound should pass before the non-commissioned officer could come.

"What sound?" asked Baynell.

"Listen, sir," said the sentry.

The night was dark. There was no moon. The stars now and then glimmering through the mists afforded scant illumination to the earth. The fires of the troops in bivouac about the town shone like thousands of constellations, reflected by the earth. The wind was surging fitfully among the pines. There was a dull iterative beat, rather felt than heard.

"The train?" suggested Baynell.

"The train is in, sir."

"Must have been a freight," Baynell hazarded, for the indefinite vibration had ceased.

"That's 'hep, hep, hep,'—that's marching feet, sir,—that's what it is!"

"Well, what of that?" Baynell demanded. "It's the corporal of the guard going out with the [Pg 279] relief."

"It's too early——"

"Grand Rounds, possibly."

"It's too near," objected the man. "It's very near."

The wind struck their faces with a dank fillip of dew. The vine hard by was dripping; they could hear the drops fall, and a silent interval, and again a falling drop.

"There is nothing now," said Baynell. "It was doubtless some patrol. The air is very moist, and sounds are heavier than usual."

"This seemed to me very near, sir," said the soldier, discontentedly. He wished he had fired his piece and called for the corporal of the guard. He had hesitated, for the corporal had scant patience with a military zealot who was forever discovering causes of alarm without foundation, and this exercise of judgment was a strain on a soldier's sense of duty. He had expected the captain to respond to the mere suggestion of a secret approach, remembering the search for the hidden Rebel officer. But Baynell had never heard of that episode!

Suddenly all the camps broke into a turbulence of sound. A hundred drums were beating the tattoo. From down the valley and over the river the bugle iterated the strain. Near the town and along the hills it was duplicated anew, and all the echoes of the crags and the rocks of [Pg 280] the river bank repeated it, and called out the mandate, and sang it again in a different key; at last it died into a fitful repetition; silence once more; an absolute hush.

A rocket went up from the fort hard by; another rose, starlike and stately, from unseen regions beyond a hill. Presently the lights were dying out like magic all along the encampments, as if some great cataclysm were among the stellular reflections, blotting them from the sphere of being. The constellations above glowed more brightly as the earth darkened. The wind was gathering force. Baynell listened as the boughs clashed and surged together.

"You doubtless heard the patrol," he said. And again—"The air is dank."

Then he turned and went within; the soldier marched back and forth, as he was destined to do for some time yet, and listened with all the keen intentness of which he was capable. And heard nothing.

The next morning—it was still before dawn—a sudden sharp clamor rose from a redoubt within which was a powder magazine near the main works, lying on the hither side of the river. The mischief which the earlier sentinel at the Roscoe place anticipated had come; how, whence,—the man now on duty hardly knew. He fired his rifle and called for the guard.

Then a few sharp reports, and a tumult of shouting sounded from the redoubt. A general alarm ensued. The drums were beating the long roll in the infantry camps,—a nerve-thrilling, terrifying vibration; and the sharp cry, "Fall in!—Fall in!" was like an incident of the keen, rare, matutinal air, the iterative command sounding like an echo from every quarter in which the lines of tents were beginning to glimmer dimly. From where the cavalry horses were picketed in long rows came the clash of accoutrements and the tramp of hoofs as the trumpets sang "Boots and Saddles!" Once a courier—a shadowy, mounted figure, half distinguishable in the gray obscurity, seeming gigantic, like some horseman of a fable—dashed past in the gloom, going or coming none could know whither. The clamors increased, the shots multiplied, then the clear, chill light came gradually over the turmoils of darkness and sudden surprise. The first rays of the sun struck upon the Confederate flag flying from the redoubt, and its paroled garrison were trooping across to the main line of fortifications, bearing the miraculous story that they had awakened to find the work full of Confederate soldiers who seemed to have mined their way into the place from some subterranean access, and who were now in the name of Julius Roscoe, their ranking officer, demanding the surrender of the fort which the redoubt overlooked. [Pg 281]

The Federal commander would have shelled them out of their precarious advantage with very hearty good-will, but he feared for the stores of powder, which he really could not spare. Moreover, the explosion of the magazine at such close quarters could but result in the total demolition of the main work and its valuable armament, inflicting also great destruction of life. Thus, although the burly and experienced warrior, Colonel Deltz, was fairly rampant with indignation at the insignificance of this bold enemy both in point of the subordinate rank of the leader and the small number of the force, he was fain to hold parley, instead of opening fire upon the redoubt at once and wiping the raiders, with one hand, as it were, from the face of the earth. It may be doubted if any capable and trusted military expert ever discharged a more distasteful duty. Nevertheless, it was performed *secundum artem*, with every show of those amenities which of all professional courtesies have the slightest root in truth and real feeling. He invited the surrender of the redoubt, ignoring the demand for the surrender of the fort as a puerile and impudent folly, offering the usual fine and humane suggestions touching the avoidance of the useless effusion of blood, such as often before have been heard when a sophistry must needs fill the breach in lieu of force. When this was declined, Julius Roscoe was reminded, in the most cautious terms, of the personal jeopardy incurred by a commander who undertakes to hold out an untenable position. Julius Roscoe's reply, couched in the same strain of courteous phraseology, such, indeed, as might have been employed by a general of division, deliberating on articles of capitulation involving the well-being of an army, intimated that he was popularly supposed to be able to take care of himself; that so far from being unprepared to hold the redoubt which he had captured, he had means at his disposal to possess himself of the fort itself, and if its garrison would but await his onset, he should be happy to entertain Colonel Deltz in his own quarters at dinner in a campaigner's simple way—say, at one of the clock. [Pg 282] [Pg 283]

These covert allusions to the signal advantages of his situation showed that Lieutenant Roscoe was fully apprized of the very large quantity of ammunition stored in the magazine, and the tone of his rejoinder intimated that he would avail himself to the uttermost of its efficiency. The works were close enough to render visible the occupations of the Confederates. Though gaunt and half-starved, many ragged and barefoot, they were as merry as grigs and as industrious as beavers, destroying such Federal stores as they could not remove, spiking or otherwise disabling the ordnance that they could not use,—the heavy howitzers at the embrasures,—and briskly preparing to serve the barbette battery, that they had shifted to command the fort and a line of intrenchments taken at a grievous disadvantage in the rear, and some lighter swivel artillery that could sweep all the horizon within range.

It was a sight to stir the gorge of a professed soldier and a martinet. If aught of action could have availed, the colonel would have welcomed a fierce and summary devoir. But the true soldier rarely allows personal antagonism or a sentimental theory to influence the line of conduct to which duty and prudence alike point. He swallowed his fury, and it was a great gulp for a heady and choleric man who had lived by burning gunpowder—lo, these many years. He perceived that his garrison, able to descry the antics of the Confederates in the redoubt, were apprized of their own imminent peril from the magazine in the hands of their enemy—now, practically a mine. There was a doubt among his observant officers as to whether the reckless band were taking any of the usual precautions, requisite in dealing with so extensive a store of explosives, as they joyfully loaded the cannon. Under these circumstances, attack being out of the question, Colonel Deltz could hardly be assured of the efficiency of his force in defence. His garrison were palsied by surprise, the mysterious appearance of the Confederates, and the impunity of their situation. They could only be shelled out of the redoubt by the jeopardy of the powder magazine itself, and its explosion would destroy the lives of the besiegers as well as the besieged. Hence strategy was requisite. The fort was gradually evacuated as a lure to draw the raiders into the main works, where they could be dealt with, thus quitting their post of advantage. [Pg 284]

Later in the day from a knob called Sugar Loaf Pinnacle an artillery fire opened, the shells falling at first at uncertain intervals, seeking to ascertain the range; then, in fast and furious succession, hurtling down upon the guns of the masked battery beside the river. The missiles seemed but tiny clouds of white smoke, each with a heart of fire, the fuse redly [Pg 285]

burning against the densely blue sky, till dropping elastically to the moment of explosion it was resolved into a fiercely white focus with rayonnant fibres and stunning clamors.

The town itself was hardly in danger during this riverside bombardment, unless, indeed, from some accident of defective marksmanship. But with all the world gone mad, the atmosphere itself a field of pyrotechnic magnificence, the familiar old mountains but a background to display the curves a flying shell might describe, now and again bursting in mid-air ere it reached its billet, the non-combatant populace was panic-stricken. Streets were deserted. All ordinary vocations ceased. The more substantial buildings of brick or stone were crowded, their walls presumed to be capable of resisting at least the spent balls, wide of aim, for these were often endowed with such a residue of energy as still to be destructive. Cellars were in request, and while the darkness precluded the terrifying glare of the bursting projectiles, nevertheless the tremendous clamor of the detonation, the wild [Pg 286] reverberations of the echoes, the shouts of cheering men, the sound of bugles and drums and of voices in command in the distance, gave intimations of what was going forward, and uncertainty perhaps enhanced fear.

"Dar, now, de Yankee man's battery is done gone too!" exclaimed Uncle Ephraim, as the voice of authority rang out sharply, with all its echo-like variants in the subalterns' commands. The clangor of accoutrements, the heavy but swift roll of the wheels of gun-carriages and caissons, the tumultuous hoof-beats of horses at full gallop, the spirited cheering of the artillerymen, filled the air—and then silence ensued, deep and dark, the stone walls of the cellar vaguely glimmering with one candle set on the head of a barrel.

"He's gone wid 'em,—dat man! Time dat bugle blow he tore dat bandage off his haid—nicked or no,—dat he did!"

Uncle Ephraim was seated on an inverted cotton basket, and Aunt Chaney, with the three "ladies" clustered about her knees, sat on the flight of steps that led down from a cautiously closed door. The "ladies" kept their fingers in their ears as a protection against sound, but the deaf-mute, strangely enough, was the most acute to discern the crash, possibly by reason of the vibrations of the air, since she could not hear the detonation of the shells.

Somehow the sturdy courage of that soldierly shout was reassuring.

"Dere ain't no danger, ladies," declared Aunt Chaney. Then, "Oh, my King!" she cried in an [Pg 287] altered voice, while the three "ladies" hid their faces in the folds of her apron as a terrific explosion took place in mid-air, the pieces of the shell falling burning in the grove.

"Jus' lissen at dat owdacious Julius!" muttered Uncle Ephraim, indignantly. "I never 'lowed he war gwine ter kick up sech a tarrifyin' commotion as dis yere, nohow."

"I wish Gran'pa would come down here," whined one of the twins.

"Where the cannon-balls can't catch him," whimpered the other.

"What you talking about, ladies?" demanded the old cook, rising to the occasion. "You 'spec' a gemman lak yer gran'pa gwine sit in de cellar, lak—lak a 'tater!"—the simile suggested by a bushel-basket half full of Irish potatoes for late planting in the "garden spot."

The "ladies," reassured by the joke, laughed shrilly, a little off the key, and clung to her comfortable fat arm that so inspired their confidence.

"*I* gwine sit in de cellar tell *I* sprout lak a 'tater, ef disher tribulation ain't ober 'twell den," declared Uncle Ephraim. "Dar now! lissen ter dat!" as once more the clamorous air broke forth with sound.

The "ladies" exclaimed in piteous accents.

"Dat ain't nuffin ter hurt, honey," Aunt Chaney reassured her trembling charges. "Dese triflin' sodjers ain't got much aim. Yer gran'pa an' yer cousin Leonora wouldn't stay up dere [Pg 288] in de lawbrary ef dere was destruction comin'."

"Then why do *you* come in the cellar?" asked the logical Adelaide.

"Jes' ter git shet o' de terror ob seein' it, honey!" replied Aunt Chaney. "I ain't no perfessor ob war, nohow, an' my eyes ain't practised ter shellin' an' big shootin'."

"Me, neither," said Adelaide.

"Nor me," whimpered Geraldine.

"De cannon-balls ain't gwine kill us, dough. We gwine live a long time," Aunt Chaney optimistically protested. "I ain't s'prised none ef when de war is ober an' we tell 'bout dis fight, we gwine make out dat when de shellin' wuz at de wust, you three ladies an' me jus' stood up on de highest aidge ob de rampart ob de fort, an' 'structed de men how ter fire de cannon, an' p'inted out de shells flyin' through de air wid dat ar actial little forefinger, an' kep' up de courage ob de troops."

"On which side, Aunt Chaney?" asked Adelaide, the reasonable.

"On bofe sides, honey," said Aunt Chaney, "'cordin' ter de politics ob dem we is talkin' to!"

A rat whisked over the floor, across the dim slant of light that fell from the candle on the head of the barrel. Uncle Ephraim, his elbows on his knees, his gray head slightly canted in a listening attitude, smiled vaguely, pleased like a child himself with Aunt Chaney's sketch. [Pg 289]

"Oh, Aunt Chaney!—*do* you s'pose we'll tell it *that* way?" cried Adelaide, meditating on the flattering contrast.

"Dat's de ve'y way de tales 'bout dis war is gwine be tole, honey, you mark my words," declared the prophetess.

The contrast of the imaginative future account with the troublous actuality of the present so delighted Adelaide that she spelled it off on her fingers to Lucille, both repairing to the side of the barrel where the candle was glimmering, in order to have the light on their twinkling fingers in the manual alphabet. The humors of the expectation, the incongruity of their martial efficiency, the boastful resources of the future, elicited bursts of delighted gigglings, and when the next shell exploded, neither took notice of the hurtling bomb shrieking over the house and bound for the river.

The rest of the populace were enjoying no such solace from any waggish interpretation of the future. The present, that single momentous day, was for them as much of time as they cared to contemplate. Doubtless the satisfaction was very general among the citizens, regardless of political prepossessions, when it became known that Captain Baynell with a detachment of horse artillery had gone out and taken up a position that had enabled him at last to silence the Confederate guns on the pinnacle, not, however, before the masked [Pg 290] battery by the river was practically dismounted.

Now both infantry and cavalry were ordered out in an effort to intercept the venturesome Rebel artillerymen as they sought to descend from their steep pinnacle of rock. The dust on the turnpike, redly aflare in the sunset rays, betokened the progress of the march, and now and then it was harassed by shells and grape from the swivel guns of the fort, for Roscoe's limited command had not been able to bring the heavier ordnance of the embrasures to bear upon the camps around the town.

The whole community was in a panic, for this might soon betide. But a gunboat came, as it chanced, up the river, took a position of advantage, and with great precision of aim soon shelled the little force out of the main work. Their capture was momently expected, but they made good their retreat to their former position in the redoubt, with the intention unquestionably of escaping thence by the secret passage which had afforded them access. In leaving, however, the powder magazine was blown up by accident or design, destroying the integrity of the whole fortification, and shattering nearly every pane of glass in the town, the force of the concussion indeed bringing the tower of the hospital hard by to the ground. That the raiders had perished was not doubted, till news came of a sharp skirmish which took [Pg 291] place under cover of darkness at the mouth of a sort of grotto in Judge Roscoe's grove, and in the confusion, surprise, and obscurity all escaped save some half-dozen left dead upon the ground.

CHAPTER XV [Pg 292]

With these important works wrecked and dismantled, with the destruction of great stores of ammunition and artillery which obviously placed the system of defence in an imperfect condition, with the difficulty of repair and supply which time and distance and insufficiency of transportation rendered insurmountable, with the elation of victory that so dashing an exploit, so thoroughly consummated, must communicate to the Confederate troops, an attack by them in force was daily expected. The capture of Roanoke City was considered an event of the near future, anticipated with joy or gloom, according to the several interests of the varied population, but in any case regarded as a foregone conclusion. Daily the Northern trains, heavily laden, bore away passengers who had no wish to become citizens of the Southern Confederacy. Perishable effects, stocks of goods of the order that a battle would endanger or destroy, were shipped to calmer regions. Reinforcements came by every train, by every boat, till all the resources of the country were strained to maintain them, and still the Southerners had not advanced to the opportunity. It was one of those occasions of the [Pg 293] Civil War when the hand that took was not strong enough to hold. The Confederate force near the town was inadequately supplied to enable it to do more than seize the advantage, which must needs be relinquished. Its slim resources admitted of no permanent occupation of the town, and the empty glory of the capture of Roanoke City would have been offset by the disastrous necessity of the evacuation of the post. Gradually the Federal lines were extended until they lay almost as before the raid on the works. The Confederate ranks had been depleted to furnish reinforcements to a more practicable point. They were falling back, and now and again sudden sallies brought in prisoners from such a distance as told the story.

The town was once more secure, work was begun on the dismantled fortifications, and daily the question of how so hazardous an enterprise could have been devised and executed revived in interest. The commanding general had not the loss of the town itself to account for, as at one time was probable, but for the destruction of a great store of ammunition, as well as the loss of life, of guns, of the works themselves, representing many thousands of dollars and the labor of regiments. All, however, seemed hardly commensurate with the disaster he would sustain in point of reputation. That such a dashing, destructive exploit could be planned and consummated under his own ceaselessly vigilant eyes appeared little [Pg 294] short of the miraculous, and for his own justification he looked needfully into its inception.

It was discovered that there was a natural subterranean passage from the grove of Judge Roscoe's place to a cellar, a portion of which had constituted the powder magazine on the Devrett hill, and that this had been exploded by means of a slow match through the grotto, previously prepared, enabling the raiders to effect their escape. It was further ascertained that Julius Roscoe, who had led the enterprise, had been in hiding for some time at his father's home, and had been seen as he issued thence covered with blood, evidently fresh from some personal altercation with a Federal officer, for weeks a guest in the house. Although bruised and bleeding, this officer could offer no account of his wounds save a fall, impossible to have produced them; he had raised no alarm, and had given no report of the presence of an enemy, whose intrusion had wrought such damage and disaster to the Union cause.

One detail led to another, each discovery unveiled cognate mysteries, the disclosure of trifles brought forward circumstances of importance. The claim of the sentinel posted at Judge Roscoe's portico that he had fired the first shot which raised the alarm, evoked the fact that an earlier sentry had told Captain Baynell that he had heard marching feet—a moving column in the cadenced step, he described it now—near, very near, that murky [Pg 295] night, and that Captain Baynell had waived it away with the suggestion of "a corporal of the guard with the relief"—at that hour!—when the next relief would not be due till nearly midnight,—and had gone back into the parlor, where Mrs. Gwynn had begun to sing, "Her bright smile haunts me still."

This account reminded several of his camp-fellows that, having been in town on leave, they had met that dark night on the turnpike a force marching in column, and naturally thinking this only the removal of Federal troops from some point to another, here, so far within the lines, they had quietly stood aside and watched the shadowy progress. Nothing amiss had occurred to their minds. The men had all their officers duly in position, and they were marching silently and with great regularity. But by reference to the various written reports, it was easily ascertained that there was no shifting of troops that day, no assignment of a company to any duty which would have taken them out at that hour, no detail reporting for service. Still following in the footsteps of this column, something more was learned from a young negro, who had been out to fish that night, which was the delight of the plantation darkey at this season of the year, and had cast his lines from under the bluff near Judge Roscoe's place; the night being foggy, he had not noticed, till they were very near, the [Pg 296] approach of three or four large open boats, filled with soldiers, to judge by the rifles, who were rowing very fast and hard against the current and keeping close in to the shore. When they landed and beached the boats they were very quiet, fell into order, and marched off without a word, except the necessary curt commands. It had never occurred to him to give the alarm. He had taken none. They had rowed so close in to shore, he thought, to avoid such a collision as had happened in the mists earlier in the night, when a large barge was run down by a gunboat and sunk. Doubtless if they had passed the picket boats, the misty invisibility of all the surface of the water protected them, but for the most part the patrol of the river pickets was further down-stream. As they had come, so they had gone, and the matter remained a nine days' wonder. The commanding general almost choked when he thought of it.

"This is going to be a serious matter for Baynell," said Colonel Ashley, one day. He had called at Judge Roscoe's partly because he did not wish to break off with abrupt rudeness an acquaintance which he had persisted in forming, and partly because he was not willing in the circumstances that had arisen to seem to shun the house.

Judge Roscoe was not at home, but Mrs. Gwynn was in the parlor. Ashley had asked her to sing. There was something "delightfully dreary," as he described it, in the searching, [Pg 297] romantic, melancholy cadences of her sweet contralto voice. He had not intended to open his heart, but somehow the mood induced by her singing, the quiet of the dim, secluded, cool drawing-rooms, with the old-fashioned, high, stucco ceiling, and the shadowy green gloom of the trees without, prevailed with him, and he spoke upon impulse.

"What matter?" she asked. She had wheeled half around on the piano-stool, and sat, her slim figure in its white dress, delicate and erect, one white arm, visible through the thin fabric, outstretched to the keyboard, the hand toying with resolving chords.

He had been standing beside the piano as she sang, but now, with the air of inviting serious discussion, he seated himself in one of the stiff arm-chairs of the carved rosewood "parlor set" of that day, and replied gravely:——

"His association with Julius Roscoe."

Her eyes widened with genuine amazement.

"It seems," proceeded Ashley, slowly, "that a dozen or two of the soldiers, who claimed to have seen a Confederate officer on the balcony here, recognized him as Julius Roscoe, when he reappeared in command of the forces that captured the redoubt. And the surgeon has always insisted that Baynell's hurt was a blow, not a fall. There is a good deal of smothered talk in various quarters."

He stroked his mustache contemplatively, looked vaguely about the room, and sighed in a certain disconsolateness. [Pg 298]

"I don't understand," said Mrs. Gwynn, sharply, fixing intent eyes upon him. "How can Captain Baynell be called in question?"

"Oh, the general theory—however well or ill grounded—is that young Roscoe was here on a reconnoitring expedition of some sort, or perhaps merely on a visit to his kindred, and that Baynell winked at his presence on account of friendship with the family, instead of arresting him, as he should have done. It's an immense pity. Baynell is a fine officer."

Mrs. Gwynn had turned pale with excitement.

"But *none of us* knew that Julius Roscoe was in the house!" she exclaimed. She hesitated a moment as the words passed her lips. Judge Roscoe's reticence on the subject might imply some knowledge of the harbored Rebel.

Ashley was suddenly tense with energy.

"Don't imagine for one moment, my dear madam, that I have any desire to extract information from you. It is no concern of mine how he came or went. I only mention the subject because it is very much on my mind and heart. And I don't see any satisfactory end to it. I have a great respect for Baynell as a man, and especially as an artillerist, and somehow in these campaigns I have contrived to get fond of the fellow!—though he is about as stiff, and unresponsive, and prejudiced, and priggish a bundle of animal fibre as ever called himself human." [Pg 299]

"Why, he doesn't give me that idea," exclaimed Leonora, her eyes widening. "He seems unguarded, and impulsive, and ardent."

Colonel Ashley was very considerably her senior and far too experienced to be ingenuous himself. He made no comment on the conviction her words created within him. He only looked at her in silence, receiving her remark with courteous attention. Then he resumed:——

"Of course in a civil war there are always some instances of undue leniency,—the pressure of circumstances induces it,—but rarely indeed such as this; it amounts to aiding and abetting the enemy, however unpremeditated. Young Roscoe could not have secured the means or information for his destructive raid had not Baynell permitted him to be housed here. Doubtless, however, Baynell thought it a mere visit of the boy to his father's family."

"But Captain Baynell never dreamed that Julius Roscoe was in the house!" she exclaimed.

"That's just what he says he *did*—dreamed that he saw him! I can rely on you not to repeat my words. But I have had no confidential talk with him."

"I am sure—I *know*—they were never together for a moment."

"The surgeon says that Roscoe's knuckles cut to the bone," commented Ashley, with a significant smile. But the triumphs of stultifying Mrs. Gwynn in conversation were all inadequate to restore his usual serene satisfaction, and once more he looked restlessly about the rooms and sighed. [Pg 300]

"What do you think Captain Baynell was guilty of? Permitting an enemy to remain within the lines, *perdu*, unsuspected, to gather information, and make off with it—conniving at the concealment, and assisting the escape of an enemy? And *you* call yourself his friend!"

Leonora's cheeks were flushed. Her voice rang with a tense vibration. She fixed her interlocutor with a challenging eye.

"Oh—I don't *know* what he intended," replied Ashley, almost irritably. "Doubtless he had some high-minded motive, so intricate that he can never explain it, and nobody else can ever unravel it. I only know he has played the fool,—and I *fear* he has ruined himself irretrievably."

"But you don't answer my question—what do *you think* he has done?"

Ashley might have responded that his conclusions were not subject to her inquisition. But his suave methods of thought and conduct could not compass this unmannerly retort. Moreover, it was a relief to his feelings to canvass the matter so paramount in his mind with an irresponsible woman, rather than with his brother officers, among whom it was rife, thereby sending his speculations and doubts and views abroad as threads to be wrought into the warp and woof of their opinion, and possibly give undue substance and color to the character of the fabric. [Pg 301]

"Why,—of course this is just my own view,—formed on what I hear from outsiders,—and I think it is the general view. Baynell knew the young man was hidden in the house, on a stolen visit to his father, thinking he had no ultimate intentions but to escape at a convenient opportunity. These separations must be very cruel indeed, with no means of communication. Baynell, though very wrongfully, *might* have indulged this concealment from motives of—ah—er—friendship to the family, for young Roscoe would undoubtedly have been dealt with as a spy, had he been captured in lurking here. The two *may* have been more or less associated,—certainly they came together in an altercation that resulted in blows. *I* think Baynell possibly discovered Roscoe's scheme, and threatened him with arrest. Roscoe knocked him down the stairs and fled from the house to the grotto, considering this safe, for he might have crossed from the balcony to the firs without observation if he had been lucky, as at that time none of us knew that the grotto existed. Now these are *my* conclusions—but for the integrity of the service Baynell's acts and his motives must be sifted. They may not bear to an impartial mind even so liberal a construction as this. It is a threatening situation, and I am apprehensive—I am very apprehensive." [Pg 302]

Mrs. Gwynn's hand fell with a discordant crash on the keys of the piano.

"Why—why—what can they do to him?" she gasped.

Vertnor Ashley shied from the subject like a frightened horse.

"Ah—oh—ah—er—well," he said, "let us not think of that." He paused abruptly. Then, "To forecast the immediate future is enough of disaster. There is already said to be an official investigation on the cards. No doubt charges will be preferred, and he will be brought to a court-martial."

He sighed again, and looked about futilely, as if for suggestion. He rose at length, and with his pleasant, cordial manner and a smile of deprecating apology, he said, "I am afraid my grim subjects do not commend me for a lady's parlor." Then with a light change of tone, "So much obliged for that lovely little French song—what is it—*Quel est cet attrait qui m'attire*? I want to be able to distinguish it, for may I not ask for it again some time?" And bowing, and smiling, and prosperous, he took his graceful departure.

Mrs. Gwynn stood motionless, her eyes on the carpet, her mind almost dazed by the magnitude, by the terrors, of the subjects of her contemplation. She felt she must be more certain; she could not leave this disastrous complication thus. She could not speak to this [Pg 303] man, friendly though he had seemed, lest she betray some fact of her own knowledge that might be of disadvantage to another who had meant no ill—nay, she was sure had done no ill. Then she was beset by the realization of the sophistry of circumstance. But if circumstance could be adduced against Baynell, should it not equally prevail in his favor? When she, knowing naught of the lurking Julius, had sent to his hiding-place this Federal officer, did not instantly the clamors of discovery resound through the house? She could hear even now in the tones of his voice, steadied and sonorous by the habit of command, sharp and decisive on the air, the words, "You are my prisoner!" twice repeated, that had summoned her, stricken with sudden panic, from her flowers on the library table to the hall, where she saw the balustrade of the stairs still shaking with the concussion of a heavy fall. And as she stood there, another moment—barely a moment—brought the apparition of Julius, flying as if for his life, a pistol in his hand, and covered with blood. Dreams! Who said aught of dreams! This was not the course a man would take who desired to shield a concealed Rebel. There was no eye-witness of the altercation. But she, on the lower floor, had heard it all—the swift ascent for the book, the exclamation of amazement, then the stern voice of command, the words of arrest, the impact of the blow, and the clamors of the fall. [Pg 304] Then the flight; she had seen Julius, fleeing for safety, fleeing from the house into the very teeth of the camps.

Should not Baynell know this, the event that preceded the long insensibility which had so blunted his impressions, his recollections? She resolved to confer with Judge Roscoe. How much he knew of Julius Roscoe's lurking visit, how much he cared for her to know, she could not be sure. She suspected that old Ephraim was fully informed, for without his services the visitor could hardly have been maintained. But neither had been at hand at the moment of discovery, of collision.

When Judge Roscoe came in she submitted this question to his judgment. To her surprise he did not canvass the matter. He said at once: "By all means Captain Baynell ought to know this. It would be best to send for him and explain to him what you saw and heard,—the whole occurrence. Captain Baynell should be made aware of all the details of the actual event that you more nearly than any one else witnessed."

The house in these summer days, with the shutters half closed and the doors all open, seemed more retired, more solitary, than when all the busy life of the place was drawn to the focus of the library fire. She was quite alone, as she traversed the hall and sat down to write at the library table. The "ladies" were playing out of doors, close in to the window [Pg 305] under a tree. Judge Roscoe had business in the town and walked thither leaning rather heavily on his cane, for no news came of Acrobat, and somehow he no longer cared to ride the glossy iron-gray that Captain Baynell still left grazing in his pastures. So still were all the precincts she feared she might not find a messenger as she went out on the latticed gallery searching for old Ephraim. But there he sat in the sun in front of the kitchen door.

He was not wont to be so silent. He said naught when she handed him the missive with her instructions, but he looked unwilling, with a sort of warning wisdom in his expression, and several times turned the note gingerly in his hand, as if he thought it might explode. He would fain have remonstrated against the renewal of communication with the elements that had brought so much disquiet into the calm life of the old house hitherto. But his lips were sealed so far as the "Yankee man" and Julius were concerned. And he would maintain that he had never seen or heard of the grotto till indeed it was blown up.

"All dese young folks is a stiff-necked and tarrifyin' generation, an' ef dey will leave ole Ephraim in peace, he p'intedly won't pester dem," he said to himself.

Therefore, merely murmuring acquiescence, "Yes'm, yes'm, yes'm," while he received his [Pg 306]
orders, he put on his hat which he had hitherto held in his hand, and walked off briskly to the tent of the artillery captain.

The succinct dignified tone of Mrs. Gwynn's note requesting to see Captain Baynell at his earliest convenience on a matter of business precluded effectually any false sentimental hopes, had any communication from her been calculated to raise them. He was already mounted, having just returned from afternoon parade; and saying to Uncle Ephraim that he would wait on Mrs. Gwynn immediately, he wheeled his horse and forthwith disappeared in the midst of the shadow and sheen of the full-leaved grove.

Baynell had changed, changed immeasurably, since she had last seen him. Always quiet and sedate, his gravity had intensified to sternness, his dignified composure to a cold, impenetrable reserve, his attentive interest to a sort of wary vigilance, all giving token of the effect wrought in his mental and moral endowment by the knowledge of the suspicions entertained concerning his actions, and the charges that were being formulated against him.

In one sense these had already slain him. His individuality was gone. He would be no more what once he was. His pride, so strong, so vivid, as essential an element of his being as his breath, as his soul, had been done to death. It had been a noble endowment, despite its
exactions, and maintained high standards and sought finer issues. It had died with the woe [Pg 307]
of a thousand deaths, that calumny should touch his name; that accusation could ever find a foothold in his life; that treachery should come to investigation in his deeds.

She rather wondered at his calmness, the self-possession expressed in his manner, his face. He had himself well in hand. He was not nervous. His haggard pallor told what the sleepless hours of self-communing brought to him, yet he was strong enough to confront the future. He would give battle to the false charge, the lying circumstance, the implacable phalanxes of the probabilities. The truth was intrinsically worth fighting for, in any event, and even now his heart could swell with the conviction that the truth could only demonstrate the impeccancy of his official record.

He met her with that grave, conventional, inexpressive courtesy which had always characterized him, and it was a little difficult, in her unusual flutter and agitation, to find a suitable beginning.

She had seated herself in the library at the table where she had written the note, and she was mechanically trifling with an ivory paper-knife, the portfolio and paper still lying before her. He took a chair near at hand and waited, not seeking to inaugurate the conversation.

"I sent for you, Captain Baynell, because I have heard something—there are rumors—"

He did not take the word from her, nor help her out. He sat quietly waiting. [Pg 308]

"In short, I think you ought to know that I overheard all that passed between you and Julius Roscoe on the stairs that morning."

Captain Baynell's rejoinder surprised her.

"Then he was really in the house?" he said meditatively.

"Oh, yes,—though I did not know it till he dashed past me in the hall. Two minutes had not elapsed since you had left me here standing by the table."

She detailed the circumstances, and when she had finished speaking he thanked her simply, and said that the facts would be of value to him.

"I thought you ought to know them, hearing Colonel Ashley describe the various rumors afloat—but, but these—they—they will soon die out?" She looked at him appealingly.

He did not answer immediately. Then—

"I shall be court-martialled," he said succinctly.

Her heart seemed almost to stand still in the presence of this great threat, yet she strove against its menace.

"Of course I know this is serious, and must trouble all your friends," she said vaguely. "But doubtless—doubtless there will be an acquittal."

"It is a matter of liberty, and life itself," he said. "But I do not care for either,—I deprecate [Pg 309]

the reflections on my character as a soldier." He hesitated for one moment, then broke out with sudden passion, "I care for the jeopardy of my honor—my sacred honor!"

There was an interval of stillness so long that a slant of the sunset light might seem to have moved on the floor. The soft babble of the voices of the children came in at the open window; the mocking-bird's jubilance rose from among the magnolia blooms outside. The great bowl on the table was full of roses, and she eyed their magnificence absently, seeing nothing, remembering all that Ashley had said, and realizing how difficult it would be to convince even him, with all his friendly good-will, of the simplicity of the motives that had precipitated the real events, so grimly metamorphosed in the monstrous mischances of war.

"Oh—" she cried suddenly, with a poignant accent, "that this should have fallen upon you in the house of your friends! We can never forgive ourselves, and you can never forgive us!"

"There is nothing to forgive," he said heartily; "I have no grievance against this kind roof. I could not expect Judge Roscoe to betray his own son, and deliver him up to capture, to death as a spy—because I happened to be here, a temporary guest. And I could not expect the young man to voluntarily surrender—for my convenience. No—I blame no one."

"You are magnanimous!" exclaimed Mrs. Gwynn, her luminous gray eyes shining through tears as she looked at him. [Pg 310]

"Only omniscience could have foreseen and guarded against this disastrous complication of adverse circumstances. But the results are serious enough to justify doubt and provoke investigation. Knowing the simple truth, it seems a little difficult to see how it can fail to be easily established—it is the imputation that afflicts me. I am not used to contemplate myself as a traitor—with my motives."

"Oh, it is so unjust—so rancorously untrue! You arrested him the moment you saw him—although he was in Judge Roscoe's house. You must have known that he was Judge Roscoe's son."

"I recognized him from his portrait—" Baynell checked himself. He would not have liked to say how often, with what jealous appraisement of its manly beauty and interest of suggestion, he had studied the portrait of Julius on the parlor wall, knowing him as a man who had loved Leonora Gwynn, and fearing him as a man whom possibly Leonora Gwynn loved.

"But I was obliged to arrest him on the spot—why, I was in honor bound."

His face suddenly fell—in this most intimate essential of true gentlemanhood, in this dearest requisition of a soldier's faith, that is yet the commonest principle of the humblest campaigner, he was held to have failed, in point of honor. He was held to have paltered and played a double part, to have betrayed alike his country, the fair name of his corps, and his own unsullied record. And this was the fiat of fair-minded men, comrades, countrymen, to be expressed in the preferred charges. [Pg 311]

Bankrupt in all he held dear, he shrank from seeming to beg the sheer empty bounty of her sympathy. He hardly cared to face these reflections in her presence. He arose to go, and it was with composed, conventional courtesy, as inexpressive as if he were some casual friendly caller, that he took his leave, resolutely ignoring all the tragedy of the situation.

The next day came the news that charges having been duly preferred he had been placed in arrest to await the action of the general court-martial to be assembled in the town.

CHAPTER XVI [Pg 312]

Ashley, in common with a number of Baynell's friends, did not recognize a fair spirit in the inception of the investigation. The military authorities in Roanoke City seemed rancorously keen to prove that naught within the scope of their own duty could have averted the disasters of the battle of the redoubt. The moral gymnastic of shunting the blame was actively in progress. The proof of treachery within the lines, individual failure of duty, would explain to the Department far more to the justification of the commander of the garrison of the town the losses both of life and material, and the jeopardy of the whole position, than admission of the fact that the military of the post had been outwitted, and that the enemy was entitled to salvos of applause for a very gallant exploit. Indeed, only specific details from one familiar with the interior of the works, to which, of course, citizens were not admitted, could have informed Julius Roscoe of the location of the powder magazine and enabled him to utilize in this connection his own early familiarity with the surroundings. Thus the theory that Julius Roscoe could not have accomplished its destruction had he not been harbored, even helped, by the connivance of a personal friend in the lines, and that friend, a Federal officer, was far more popular among the military authorities than the [Pg 313]

simple fact that a Rebel had been detected visiting his father's house by a Federal officer, a guest therein, promptly arrested, and in the altercation the one had been hurt and the other had escaped. Had the capture of the redoubt never occurred later as a sequence, this transient encounter of Baynell's would hardly have elicited a momentary notice.

The aspect of the court-martial was far from reassuring even to men of worldly experience on broad lines. The impassive, serious, bearded faces, the military figures in full-dress uniform, the brilliant insignia of high rank being specially pronounced, for of course no officer of lower degree than that of the prisoner was permitted to sit, were ranged on each side of a long table on a low rostrum in a large room, formerly a fraternity hall, in a commercial building now devoted to military purposes. The spectacle might well have made the heart quail. It seemed so expressive of the arbitrary decrees of absolute force, oblivious of justice, untempered by mercy!

A jury as an engine of the law must needs be considered essentially imperfect, and subject to many deteriorating influences, only available as the best device for eliciting fact and appraising crises that the slow development of human morals has yet presented. But to a [Pg 314] peaceful civilian a jury of ignorant, shock-headed rustics might seem a safe and reasonable repository of the dearest values of life and reputation in comparison with this warlike phalanx, combining the functions of both judge and jury, the very atmosphere of destruction sucked in with every respiration.

The president, a brevet brigadier-general, at the head of the table, was of a peculiarly fierce physiognomy, that yet was stony cruel. The judge-advocate at the foot had the look of laying down the law by main force. He had a keenly aggressive manner. He was a captain of cavalry, brusque, alert; he had dark side whiskers and a glancing dark eye, and was the only man on the rostrum attired in an undress uniform. His multifarious functions as the official prosecutor for the government, and also adviser to the court, and yet attorney for the prisoner to a degree,—by a theory similar to the ancient fiction of English law that the judge is counsel for the accused,—would seem, in civilian estimation, to render him "like Cerberus, three gentlemen at once," as Mrs. Malaprop would say, or a military presentment of Pooh-Bah. The nominal military accuser, acting in concert with the judge-advocate, seated at a little distance, was conscious of sustaining an unpopular *rôle*, and it had tinged his manner with disadvantage. The prisoner appeared without any restraint, of course, but wearing no [Pg 315] sword. The special values of his presence, his handsome face, his blond hair and beard that had a glitter not unlike the gold lace of his full-dress uniform, his fine figure and highbred, reserved manner, were very marked in his conspicuous position, occupying a chair at a small table on the right of the judge-advocate. Baynell had a calm dignity and a look of steady, immovable courage incongruous with his plight, arraigned on so base a charge, and yet a sort of blighted, wounded dismay, as unmistakable as a burn, was on his face, that might have moved even one who had cared naught for him to resentment, to protest for his sake.

The light of the unshaded windows, broad, of ample height, and eight or ten in number on one side of the room, brought out in fine detail every feature of the scene within. Beneath no sign of the town appeared, as the murmur of traffic rose softly, for the building was one of the few three-story structures, and the opposite roofs were low. The aspect of the far-away mountains, framed in each of the apertures, with the intense clarity of the light and the richness of tint of the approaching summer solstice, was like a sublimated gallery of pictures, painted with a full brush and of kindred types. Here were the repetitious long ranges, with the mouldings of the foot-hills at the base, and again a single great dome, amongst its mysterious shimmering clouds, filled the canvas. Now in the background were [Pg 316] crowded all the varying mountain forms, while a glittering vacant reach of the Tennessee River stretched out into the distance. And again a bridge crossed the currents, light and airy in effect, seeming to spring elastically from its piers, in the strong curves of the suspended arches, while a sail-boat, with its head tucked down shyly as the breeze essayed to chuck it under the chin, passed through and out of sight. Another window showed the wind in a bluffer mood, wrestling with the storm clouds; showed, too, that rain was falling in a different county, and the splendors of the iris hung over far green valleys that gleamed prismatically with a secondary reflection.

The room was crowded with spectators, both military and civilian, finding seats on the benches which were formerly used in the fraternity gatherings and which were still in place. The case had attracted much public attention. There were few denizens of the town who had not had individual experiences of interest pending the storming of the fort, and this fact invested additional details with peculiar zest and whetted the edge of curiosity as to the inception of the plan and the means by which Julius Roscoe's exploit had become practicable. The effect of the imposing character of the court was manifested in the perfect decorum observed by the general public. There was scarcely a stir during the opening of the proceedings. The order convening the court was read to the accused, and he was offered his [Pg 317] right to challenge any member of the court-martial for bias or other incompetency. Baynell declined to avail himself of this privilege. There ensued a moment of silence. Then, with a metallic clangor, for every member wore his sword, the court rose, and, all standing, a glittering array, the oath was administered to each of the thirteen by the judge-advocate. Afterward the president of the court, of course the ranking officer present, himself administered the oath to the judge-advocate, and the prosecution opened.

The military accuser was the first witness sworn and interrogated, but the prosecution had much other testimony tending to show that the prisoner had been living in great amity with persons notoriously of sentiments antagonistic to the Union cause, as exemplified by his long stay in Judge Roscoe's house; that he was in correspondence and even in intimate association with a Rebel in hiding under the same roof; that either with treacherous intent, or for personal reasons, he had leniently permitted this enemy in arms to lie *perdu* within the lines and subsequently to escape with such information as had resulted in great loss of men, materials, and money to the Federal government; that he had been apprised, by the sentinel at the door, of the approach of a body of troops the night before the attack on the redoubt took place, and that he nefariously or negligently declined to investigate the incident. Most of this evidence, however, was circumstantial.

The defence met it strenuously at every point. The intimacy between Judge Roscoe and the [Pg 318]
Baynell family was shown to be of a far earlier date, and the friendship utterly devoid of any connection with political interests; in this relation the accused had in every instance subordinated his personal feeling to his military duty, even going so far as to cause the property of his host's niece to be seized for military service,—the impressment of the horse, which Colonel Ashley testified he had at that time considered an unwarrantable bit of official tyranny, some individuals being allowed to retain their horses through the interposition of army officers among their friends.

Colonel Ashley testified further that the prisoner was such a stickler on trifles, as to seek to check him, a person of responsibility and discretion, an experienced officer, in expressing some casual speculations in the presence of Judge Roscoe concerning troops on an incoming train.

The accused admitted that he had not investigated the sound of marching troops in the thrice-guarded lines of the encampment, but urged it was no part of his duty and impracticable. Small detachments were coming and going at all hours of the night. If an officer of the guard, going out with the relief or a patrol, had seen fit to march across Judge Roscoe's grove, it was no concern of his nor of the sentinel's. He had no divination of the proximity of the enemy.

Perhaps the ardor of the witnesses, called in Captain Baynell's behalf, when the prosecution [Pg 319]
had rested at length, made an impression unfavorable to the idea of impartiality. More than one on cross-examination was constrained to acknowledge that he was swayed by the sense of the prisoner's hitherto unimpugnable record, and his high standing as a soldier. No such admission could be wrung from Judge Roscoe, skilled in all the details of the effect of testimony. His plain asseverations that his son had come to his house, not knowing that a Federal officer was a temporary inmate, the account of the simple measures taken to defeat the guest's observation or detection of the young Rebel's propinquity, the reasonableness of his quietly awaiting an opportunity to run the pickets when a chance meeting resulted in discovery and a collision—all went far to establish the fact that the presence of Julius Roscoe was but one of those stolen visits home in which the adventurous Southern soldiers delighted and of which Captain Baynell had no sort of knowledge till the moment of their encounter, when Julius rushed forth to the gaze of all the camp.

This was the point of difficulty with the prosecution, the point of danger with the defence,—
the adequacy of the proof as to the prisoner's knowledge of the presence of the Rebel in hiding, harbored in the house. For this the prosecution had the apparition of the
Confederate officer, covered with blood and later identified as Julius Roscoe, and the [Pg 320]
condition of Baynell's wound, which the surgeon swore was a "facer," delivered by an expert boxer. Evidently this came from an altercation, in which both had forborne the use of weapons, thus suggesting some collision of interests, as between personal associates or former friends rather than a hand-to-hand conflict of armed enemies.

On this vital point, to form the conclusions of military men, Baynell could command no testimony save that of the Roscoe household,—the most important witness of course being the judge himself, who had devised and controlled all the methods to keep the Federal officer unsuspicious and tranquil, and to maintain the lurking Rebel in security. The anxiety of the authorities to fix the responsibility for the disclosure of the military information concerning the interior of the works, which only one familiar with the location of the magazine could have given, had induced them to ignore Judge Roscoe's shelter of their enemy, thus avoiding the entanglement of a slighter matter with the paramount consideration under investigation. While the fact that his feelings as a father must needs have coerced Judge Roscoe into harboring and protecting his son and requiring his servant to minister to his wants, still the recital of the concealment of his presence affronted the
sentiment of the court-martial, even though Judge Roscoe's part was obviously restricted to [Pg 321]
the sojourn of the Confederate officer in his house, for he had no knowledge of the details of the escape and subsequent adventures.

The course of the proceedings of such a body was not competent to afford any very marked relaxations in the line of comedy relief. But certainly old Ephraim, when summoned to the stand, must have been in any other presence a mark of irresistible derision, not unkind, to be sure, and devoid of bitterness.

Keenly conscious that he had been discovered in details which to "Marse Soldier" were a stumbling-block and an offence, and that his own prestige for political loyalty was shattered,

—for he doubted if it were possible to so present the contradiction of his conviction of his interest and yet his adherence to old custom and fidelity in such a guise that the brevet brigadier would do aught but snort at it,—he came, bowing repeatedly, cringing almost to the earth, his hat in his hand, his worn face seamed in a thousand new wrinkles, and looking nearly eighty years of age. The formidable embodiment of military justice fixed him with a stern comprehensive gaze, and the brigadier, who had no realization of the martial terrors of his own appearance, sought to reassure him by saying in his deep bluff voice, "Come forward, Uncle Ephraim, come forward." The old negro started violently, then bowed once more in humble deprecation. Suddenly he perceived Baynell. In his relief to recognize the [Pg 322] face of a friend he forgot the purport of the assemblage, and broke out with a high senile chirp.

"*You* here, Cap'n! Well, sah! I is p'intedly s'prised." Then recollecting the situation, he was covered with confusion, especially as Baynell remained immovable and unresponsive, and once more old Ephraim bowed to the earth.

Not a little doubt had been felt by the court when deliberating upon the admissibility of the testimony of the old negro. It was contrary to the civil law of the state and contravened also the theory of the unbounded influence over the slave which the master exerts. In view of the pending abolition of slavery, both considerations might be considered abrogated, and since this testimony was of great importance to the prosecution as well as to the defence, bearing directly on the main point at issue,—as a freedman he was duly sworn. The members of the court-martial had ample opportunity to test the degree of patience with which they had been severally endowed as the old darkey was engineered through the preliminary statements; inducted into the witness-chair on the left hand of the judge-advocate, his hat inverted at his feet, with his red bandanna handkerchief filling its crown; induced to give over his acquiescent iteration, "Yes, sah! Yes, sah! jes' ez *you* say!" regardless of the significance of the question; and at last fairly launched on the rendering of his testimony. The prosecution, [Pg 323] however, soon thought he was no such fool as he seemed, for the details of the earlier sojourn of Julius had a simplicity that was coercive of credence. The old servant stated, as if it were a matter of prime importance, that he had to feed him in the salad-bowl. He "das'ent fetch Marse Julius a plate 'kase de widder 'oman, dat's Miss Leonora, mought miss it. But *he* didn't keer, little Julius didn't,"—then to explain the familiarity of the address he stated that "Julius de youngest ob Marster's chillen—de Baby-chile." Old Ephraim repeated this expression often, thinking it mitigated the fall from political grace which he himself had suffered, because of the leniency which must be shown to a "Baby-chile." And now and then, at first, the court-martial, though far from lacking in brainy endowment and keen perception, were at sea to understand that the "Baby-chile" would have been allowed to smoke a *see*gar,—he being "plumb desperate" for tobacco,—except so anxious was Judge Roscoe to avoid attracting the suspicion of Captain Baynell, who would "have tuk little Julius in quick as a dog snappin' at a fly! Yes—sah—yes—Cap'n," with a deprecatory side glance at Baynell. "De Baby-chile couldn't even dare to smoke, fur fear de Cap'n mought smell it from out de garret. De Baby-chile wanted a *see*gar so bad he sont his Pa forty messages a day. [Pg 324] But his Pa didn't allow him ter light one—not one; he jes' gnawed the e-end."

It required, too, some mental readjustment to recognize the "Baby-chile" in the young Samson, who had almost carried off the gates of the town itself, the key of the whole department, on his stalwart back. This phrase was even more frequently repeated as Uncle Ephraim entered upon the details of Julius's escape and his attack on Baynell—it seemed to mitigate the intensity with which he played at the game of war to speak of it as the freaks of a "Baby-chile."

The witness could produce no replies to the question, and indeed he had no recollection, as to how Julius Roscoe became possessed of the facts concerning the works, for old Ephraim did not realize that he himself had afforded this information—acquired in aimlessly tagging after the detail sent for ammunition, the negroes coming and going with scant restriction in the camps of their liberators. But very careful was he to let fall no word of the citizen's dress he had conveyed to the "Baby-chile" in the grotto, under cover of night.

"Bress Gawd!" he said to himself, "it's de Cap'n on trial—*not me*!"

He detailed with great candor the lies he had told Captain Baynell, when, emerging from his long insensibility, he had asked about the Rebel officer. "It was a dream," the witness had told "Cap'n." In Captain Baynell's earlier illness he had often been delirious, and it had [Pg 325] amused him when he recovered to hear the quaint things he had said; sometimes "Cap'n" himself described to Judge Roscoe or to the surgeon the queer sights he had seen, the results of the morphine administered. So in this instance he had hardly seemed surprised, but had let it pass like the rest.

Uncle Ephraim did not vary these statements in any degree, not even under the ordeal of cross-examination. Indeed, he stood this remarkably well and left the impression he had made unimpaired. But when he was told that he might stand aside, and it entered into his comprehension that the phrase meant that he might leave the room, he fairly chirped with glee and obvious relief.

"Thankee, Marse Gen'al!" he said to the youngest member of the court, a captain, to whom he had persisted in addressing most of his replies, and had continuously promoted to the rank of general, as if this high station obviously best accorded with the young officer's

deserts.

Old Ephraim scuttled off to the door, stumbling and hirpling in his haste and agitation, and it had not closed on him, when his "Bress de Lawd! he done delivered me f'om dem dat would have devoured me!" resounded through the room.

There was a laugh outside—somebody in the corridor opined that the court-martial wanted no such tough old morsel, but not a smile touched the serious faces on each side of the table, and the next witness was summoned. [Pg 326]

This was Mrs. Gwynn. She produced an effect of sober elegance in her dress of gray barège, wearing a simple hat of lacelike straw of the same tint, with velvet knots of a darker gray, on her beautiful golden-brown hair. The court-martial, guaranteed to have no heart, had, as far as perceptible impression was concerned, no eyes. They looked stolidly at her as, with a swift and adaptive intelligence, she complied with the formalities, and her testimony was under way.

So youthful, so girlish and fair of face, so sylphlike in form was she, that her appearance was of far more significance in their estimation than their apparent lack of appreciation might betoken. More than one who had begun to incline to the views of the prosecution thought that he beheld here the influence which had fostered treason and brought a fine officer to a forgetfulness of his oath, a disregard of his duty, and the destruction of every value of life and every consolation of death.

Her manner, however, was not that of a siren. All the incongruities of her aspect were specially pronounced as she sat in the clear light of the window and looked steadfastly at each querist in turn, so soberly, so earnestly, with so little consciousness of her beauty, that it seemed in something to lack, as if a more definite aplomb and intention of display could enhance the fact. [Pg 327]

Apparently it was a conclusive testimony that she was giving, for it was presently developed that she did not know that Julius Roscoe was in the house; that she herself had suggested to Captain Baynell to go in search of a book up the stairs to his hiding-place, from which there was no other mode of egress; that in less than two minutes she heard Captain Baynell's loud exclamations of surprise, and the words in his voice, very quick and decisive—"You are my prisoner!" twice repeated. She had rushed to the door of the hall to hear a crash as of a fall, and she saw the balustrade of the staircase, which was the same structure throughout the three stories, shaking, as Julius Roscoe, covered with blood, dashed by her and out into the balcony. She knew that Baynell was delirious subsequently, and that he was kept in ignorance as to what had occasioned his fall.

There was a degree of discomfiture on the part of the prosecution. It was not that the judge-advocate was specially bloody-minded or vindictive. He had a part to play, and it behooved him to play it well. It would seem that if the prosecution broke down on so obvious and simple a case, which had been the nucleus of so much disaster, blame might attach to him, by the mere accident of his position. These reflections rendered him ingenious, and with the license of cross-examination he began with personalities. [Pg 328]

"You have stated that you are a widow?"

"Yes. I am the widow of Rufus Allerton Gwynn."

"You do not wear widow's weeds?"

"No. I have laid them aside."

"In contemplation of matrimony?"

"No."

"Is not the accused your accepted suitor?"

"No."

Baynell was looking down at a paper in his hand. His eyelids flickered, then he looked up steadily, with a face of quiet attention.

A member of the court preferred the demand:—

"Was he ever a suitor for your hand?"

"Yes." Her face had flushed, but she kept her eyes steadily fixed on the questioner.

The president of the court cleared his throat as if minded to speak. Then obviously with the view of avoiding misunderstandings as to dates he formulated the query: "Was this recent? May I ask *when* you declined his proposal?"

"I am not certain of the date," she replied. "It was—let me think—it was the evening of a day when the neighborhood sewing-circle met at my uncle's house. I remember, now—it was the sixth of May."

"Did Captain Baynell attend the meeting of the sewing-circle?"—the judge-advocate permitted himself an edge of satire.

"He was present, and Colonel Ashley, and Lieutenant Seymour." [Pg 329]

"Oh!" said the judge-advocate, at a loss.

At a loss and doubtful, but encouraged. To his mind she offered the key to the situation. Keenly susceptible to feminine influence himself, he fancied he could divine its effect on another man. He proceeded warily, reducing his question to writing, while on various faces ranged about the table appeared a shade of doubt and even reprobation of the tone he was taking.

"You have laid aside the insignia of mourning—yet you do not contemplate matrimony. You are very young."

"I am twenty-three—as I have already stated."

"You may live a long time. You may live to grow old. You propose to live alone the remainder of your days. Did you tell Captain Baynell that?"

"In effect, yes."

Her face had grown crimson, then paled, then the color came again in patches. But her voice did not falter, and she looked at her interlocutor with an admirable steadiness. The president again cleared his throat as if about to speak. The shade of disapprobation deepened on the listening faces.

The judge-advocate leaned forward, wrote swiftly, then read in a tantalizing tone, as of one who has a clincher in reserve:—

"Now was not that a mere feminine subterfuge? You know you could hardly be *sure* that you will never marry again—at your age." [Pg 330]

Once more the president cleared his throat, but he spoke this time.

"Do you desire to push this line of investigation farther?" he said, objection eloquent in his deep, full voice.

"One moment, sir." The judge-advocate had been feeling his way very cautiously, but he was flustered by the interruption, and he was conscious that he put his next question less adroitly than he had intended.

"Why are you so sure, if I may ask?"

There was a tense silence. She said to herself that this was no time or place for finical delicacy. A man's life, his honor, all he held dear, were in jeopardy, and it had fallen to her to say words that must needs affect the result. She answered steadily. "My reply to Captain Baynell was not actuated by any objections to him. I know nothing of him but what is greatly to his credit." She hesitated for a moment. She had grown very white, and her eyes glittered, but her voice was still firm as she went on:——

"There is no reason why I should not speak freely under these circumstances, for every one knows—every one who is cognizant of our family affairs—that my married life was extremely wretched. I was very unhappy, and I told Captain Baynell that I would never marry again."

Dead silence reigned for a moment. They had all heard the story of her hard fate. The discussion as to whether a chair had been merely broken over her head, or she had been dragged about her home one woful midnight by the masses of her beautiful hair, was insistently suggested as the sunlight lay athwart it now, and the breeze moved its tendrils caressingly. The eyes of the court-martial looked at the judge-advocate with fiery reproach, and the heart of the court-martial beat for her for the moment with chivalric partisanship. [Pg 331]

For the first time Baynell seemed to lose his composure. His face was scarlet, his hands trembled. He was biting his under lip violently in an effort at self-control; he was experiencing an agony of sympathy and regret that this should be forced upon her, of helpless fury that he could be of no avail.

Still once more the president cleared his throat, this time peremptorily. The judge-advocate, considerably out of countenance, hastily forestalled him, that he might justify his course by bringing out the point he desired to elicit, reading his question aloud for its submission to the court, though her last reply had rendered his clincher of little force.

"Did you say to Captain Baynell that you have no intention of marrying again merely as a subterfuge—to soften the blow, because you expect to marry Lieutenant Roscoe as soon as the war is over?"

His suspicion that Baynell had been accessory to the concealment of young Roscoe so long as he did not fear him as a rival was evident. Baynell turned suddenly and stared with startled eyes in which an amazed dismay contended with futile anger that this,—such a motive—such a course of action, could be attributed to him. [Pg 332]

She replied only to the obvious question, evidently not realizing the implication. The tension was over; her color had returned; her voice was casual.

"No. I have no thought of marrying Lieutenant Roscoe."

"Has he asked you to marry him?"

"Long ago,—when he was a mere boy."

"And again since your widowhood?"

"No."

"You have seen him since?"

"Only that morning when he rushed past me in the hall," she replied, not apprehending the trend of his questions.

"Captain Baynell must have had some reason to think you would marry him, or he would not have asked you. You rejected him one evening. The next morning he arrested Lieutenant Roscoe, who had been in hiding in the house,—was there some understanding between you and Captain Baynell,—had he earlier forborne this arrest in the expectation of your consent, and was the arrest made in revenge on a rival whom he fancied a successful suitor?"

She looked at the judge-advocate with a horrified amazement eloquent on her face. [Pg 333]

"No! No! Oh," she cried in a poignant voice, "if you knew Captain Baynell, you could not, you would not, advance such implications against him,—who is the very soul of honor."

The judge-advocate was again for an instant out of countenance.

"You thought so little of him yourself as to reject his addresses," he said by way of recovering himself.

She was absorbed in the importance of the crisis. She did not realize the effect of her words until after she had uttered them.

"I did not appreciate his character then," she said simply.

Once more there was an interval of tense and significant silence. Baynell, suddenly pale to the lips, lifted startled eyes as if he sought to assure himself that he had heard aright. Then he bent his gaze on the paper in his hand.

Mrs. Gwynn, tremulous with excitement, appreciated a moment later the inadvertent and personal admission, and a burning flush sprang into her cheeks. The judge-advocate took instant advantage of her loss of poise.

"I don't know what you mean by that—that you would not reject him again? Will you explain?" he read his question with a twinkling eye that nettled and harassed her.

A member of the court-martial objected to the interrogation as "frivolous and unnecessary," [Pg 334] and therefore it was not addressed to the witness. A pause ensued.

The brevet brigadier cleared his throat.

"Have you concluded this line of investigation?" he said to the judge-advocate, for the prosecution was obviously breaking down.

"I believe we are about through," said the judge-advocate, vacuously, looking at a list in his hand, "that is"—to the accused—"if you have no questions to put in reëxamination." And as Mrs. Gwynn was permitted to depart from the room, he still busied himself with his list. "Three names, yet. These are the children, sir."

Every member of the household of Judge Roscoe was summoned as a witness for the defence, to seek to establish Baynell's innocence in these difficult circumstances, even the little girls, and indeed otherwise the prosecution would have subpoenaed them on the theory that if there were any treachery, the children had not the artifice to conceal it. So far this testimony was unequivocal. Judge Roscoe had sworn to the simple facts and the measures taken to avoid the notice of the Federal officer. Uncle Ephraim's testimony, save for the withheld episode of the grotto, the exact truth, was corroborative, but suffered somewhat from his reputation for wearing two faces, his sobriquet of "Janus" being adduced by the prosecution. Mrs. Gwynn had affirmed that she herself did not know or suspect the presence [Pg 335] of Julius in the house, so completely was he held *perdu*. The agitated little twins, each examined as to her knowledge of the obligations of an oath and sworn, separately testified in curiously clipped, suppressed voices that they knew nothing, heard nothing, saw nothing of Julius Roscoe in the house.

In the face of this unanimity it seemed impossible to prove aught save that in one of those hazardous visits home, so dear to the rash young Southern soldiers, the father had taken successful precautions to defeat suspicion; and the Confederate officer had shown great adroitness in carrying out the plan of his campaign which his observations inside the lines had suggested.

On the last day of the trial Captain Baynell was beginning to breathe more freely, all the testimony having been taken except the necessarily formal questioning of the dumb child. As she was sworn and interrogated, one of the other children, sworn anew for the purpose, acted as her interpreter, being more accustomed than the elders to the use of the manual alphabet. The court-room was interested in the quaint situation. The aspect of the two little

children, in their white summer attire, in this incongruous environment, with their tiny hands lifted in signalling to each other, their eyes shining with excitement, touched the spectators to smiles and a stir of pleasant sympathy. Now and then Geraldine's silvery treble faltered while repeating the question, to demonstrate her comprehension of it, and she [Pg 336] desisted from her task to gaze in blue-eyed wonder over her shoulder at the crowd. The deaf-mute was passed over cursorily by the defence, only summoned in fact that no one of the household might be omitted or seem feared. Suddenly one of the members of the court asked a question in cross-examination. In civil life this officer, a colonel of volunteers, had been an aurist of some note and the physician in attendance in a deaf-and-dumb asylum. He was a portly, robust man, whose prematurely gray hair and mustache were at variance with his florid complexion and his bright, still youthful, dark eyes. He had a manner peculiarly composed, bland, yet commanding. He leaned forward abruptly on the table; with an intent, questioning gaze he caught the child's eyes as she stood lounging against the tall witness-chair. Then as he lifted his hands it was obvious that he was far more expert in the manual alphabet than Geraldine. In three minutes it was evident to the assembled members of the court-martial on each side of the long table, the president at its head, the judge-advocate at its foot, that the line of communication was as perfect as if both spoke. Delighted to meet a stranger who could converse fluently with her, the child's blue eyes glittered, her cheek flushed; she was continually laughing and tossing back the curls of her rich chestnut hair, as if she wished to be free of its weight while she gave every capacity to this matter. And yet in [Pg 337] her youth, her innocence, her inexperience, she knew naught of the ultimate significance of the detail.

It was an evidence of the degree to which she was isolated by her infirmity, how slight was her participation in the subtler interests of the life about her, that she had no remote conception of the intents and results of the investigation. Even her curiosity was manacled—it stretched no grasp for the fact. She did not question. She did not dream that it concerned Captain Baynell. She had no idea that trouble had fallen upon him. Tears to her expressed woe, or a visage of sadness, or the environment of poverty or physical hurt—but this bright room, with its crowd of intent spectators; this splendid array of uniformed men of an august aspect; her own friend, Captain Baynell, present, himself in full regimentals, calm, composed, quiet, as was his wont, looking over a paper in his hand—how was the restricted creature to imagine that this was the arena of a life-and-death conflict.

"Yes!" the little waxen-white fingers flashed forth. "Yes, indeed, she had known that Soldier-Boy was in the house. That was Julius!"

She gave the military salute with her accustomed grace and spirit, lifting her hand to the brim of her hat, and looked laughing along the line of stern, bearded faces and military [Pg 338] figures on either side of the long table.

The other "ladies" did not know that Soldier-Boy was there, though they saw him, and she saw him, too! It was in the library, and it was just about dusk. They were surprised, and came and told the family that they had seen a ghost. They knew no better! They were young and they were little. They were only six, the twins, and she was eight; a great girl indeed!

Once more she tossed back her hair, and, with her eyes intent from under the wide Leghorn brim of her hat, bedecked with bows of a broad white ribbon with fluffy fringed edges, she watched his white military gauntlets, uplifted as he asked the next question on his slow fingers.

How her own swiftly flickered!

Yes, indeed, she had told the family better. It was no ghost, but only Soldier-Boy! She had told Captain Baynell. She wanted him to see Soldier-Boy. He was beautiful—the most beautiful member of the family!

Oh, yes, Baynell knew he was in the house. She had told him by her sign. When she had first shown him Soldier-Boy's fine portrait, they had told him what she meant.

No! Captain Baynell had not forgotten! For when she said it was no ghost, but Soldier-Boy, Cousin Leonora cried out, "Oh, she means Julius; that is her sign for him!" Cousin Leonora did not use the manual alphabet; she read the motion of her lips. None of them used the [Pg 339] alphabet except a little bit; Soldier-Boy the best of all.

Throughout there was a continual ripple of excitement among the members and several heads were dubiously shaken. More than once Baynell's counsel sought to interpose an objection,—mindful of the preposterous restrictions of his position, swiftly writing his views, transmitted, as if he himself were dumb, through the prisoner to the judge-advocate and by him to the court. The testimony of the witness could not be legally taken this way, he insisted, merely by the repetition of what she had said, by a member of the court-martial for the benefit of the rest.

The peculiar petulance of those who lack a sense was manifested in the acrimony which shone in the child's eyes as she perceived that he sought to restrict and repress her statement of her views. When he ventured himself to ask her a question, having some knowledge of the manual alphabet, she merely gazed at his awkward gesticulations with an expression of polite tolerance, making no attempt to answer, then cast up her eyes, as who should say, "Saw ever anybody the like of that!" and catching the intent gaze of the

brigadier, she burst into a sly coquettish ripple of laughter that had all the effect of a roguish aside. Then, turning to the ex-surgeon, her fingers flickered forth the hope that he would come and see her and talk. When the war was over, she was going back to school where she had learned the manual alphabet,—there, although dumb, they talked much. [Pg 340]

The mention of the word "school" suggested an idea which obviated the difficulty as to how this extraordinary testimony could be put into such shape as to render it available, impervious to cavil, strictly in accordance with precedent in the case of witnesses who are "mute by the visitation of God." The cross-examiner asked her if she could write. How she tossed her head in pride and scorn of the question! Write—of course she could write. Cousin Leonora had taught her.

When she was placed in a chair, and mounted on a great book beside the judge-advocate—looking like a learned mushroom under her big white hat, her white flounced skirts fluttering out, her long white hose and slippered feet dangling—he wrote the questions and accommodated her with a blotting-pad and pen, and it may be doubted if ever hitherto a small bunch of fabric and millinery contained so much vainglory. In truth the triumph atoned for many a soundless day—to note the surprise on his solemn visage, between his Burnside whiskers, as she glanced covertly up into his face, watching the effect of her first answer, five or six lines of clear, round handwriting, sensibly expressed, and perfectly spelled. She wrote much the more legibly of the two, and once there occurred a break when one of the members of the court asked a question in writing, and she was constrained to put one hand [Pg 341] before her face to laugh gleefully, for one of his capital letters was so bad—she was great on capitals—that she must needs ask what was meant by it.

Baynell, in reëxamination, himself wrote to ask what he had said when he was told that the ghost in the library was Julius Roscoe.

"Nothing," she wrote in answer, all unaware how she was destroying him. "Nothing at all. You just looked at me and then looked at Cousin Leonora. But Grandpa said, 'Oh, fie! oh, fie!' all the time."

Thus the extraordinary testimony was taken. The paper, with her answers in her round childish characters and flourishing capitals, all as plain as print and exhibiting a thorough comprehension of what she was asked, was handed to each of the members of the court-martial, here and there eliciting a murmur of surprise at her proficiency. The prosecution, that had practically broken down, now had the point of the sword at the throat of the defence.

There was naught further necessary but to confront the earlier witnesses with this episode. Mrs. Gwynn, recalled, stared in amazement for a moment as a question was put as to the significant event of the discovery of a ghost in the library, one afternoon. Then as the reminiscence grew clear to her mind, she rehearsed the circumstance, stating in great confusion that she had disregarded it at the time, and had forgotten it since. [Pg 342]

So unimportant, was it?

She had thought it merely some folly of the children's; they were always taking silly little frights. She did remember that she had told Captain Baynell once before that the military salute was the child's sign for Julius Roscoe, and that she had repeated this information then. No—Captain Baynell made no search in the library where the supposed ghost was seen,—no,—nor elsewhere.

When Mrs. Gwynn, under the stress of these revelations, broke down and burst into tears, the eyes of the members of the court-martial intently regarding her were unsympathetic eyes, despite her beauty and charm,—the more unsympathetic because Judge Roscoe had also remembered these circumstances, stating, however, that they had not alarmed him, for Captain Baynell evidently did not understand.

"Is his knowledge of English, then, so limited?" he was ironically asked.

Old Ephraim, too, was able to recollect the fact of the child's disclosure of the presence of Julius Roscoe in the house to Captain Baynell,—declaring, though, that he himself had hindered its comprehension by upsetting the coffee urn full of scalding coffee, which he had just brought to the table where the group were sitting, thus effecting a diversion of interest.

All the witnesses were dismissed at last, and the final formal defence was presented in [Pg 343] writing. The room was cleared and the judge-advocate read aloud to the members of the court the proceedings from the beginning. Laboriously, earnestly, impartially, they bent their minds to weigh all the details, and then for a time they sat in secluded deliberation—a long time, despite the fact that the conclusions of the majority admitted of no doubt. Several of the members revolted against the inevitable result, argued with vehemence, recapitulated all in Baynell's favor with the fervor of eager partisans, and at last protested with a passion of despair against the decision, for the finding was adverse and the unanimity of two-thirds of the votes rendered the penalty death.

The sentence was of course kept secret until it should be approved and formally promulgated by authority. But the public had readily divined the result and anticipated naught from the revision of the proceedings.

Suspense is itself a species of calamity. It has all the poignant acuteness of hope without the buoyancy of a sustained expectation, and all the anguish of despair without its sense of conclusiveness and the surcease of striving. Pending the review of the action of the court-martial Baynell discovered the wondrous scope of human suffering disassociated from physical pain. He had seriously thought he might die of his wounded pride, thus touched in [Pg 344] honor, in patriotism, in life itself, and therefore he was amazed by the degree of solace he experienced in the sight of a woman's tears shed for his sake. For to Leonora Gwynn he seemed a persecuted martyr, with all a soldier's valor and a saint's impeccability. No one could know better than she the falsity of the charges against him, and in her resentment against the unhappy chances and the military law that had overwhelmed him, and her absolute despair for his fate, he enlisted all her heart. Those high and noble qualities which he possessed and which she revered were elicited in the extremity of his mortal peril. His exacting conscientiousness; his steadfast courage on the brink of despair; his absolute truth; his constancy in adversity; his strict sense of justice which would not suffer him to blame his friends whose concealments had wrought his ruin, nor his enemies who seemed indeed rancorously zealous in aspersing him that they might exculpate themselves at his risk; his lofty sense of honor which he valued more than life itself,—all showed in genuine proportions in the bleak unidealizing light which an actual vital crisis brings to bear on the incidents of personal character.

She had even a more tender sympathy for his simpler traits, the filial friendship which he still manifested for Judge Roscoe, his affectionate remembrance of the little children of the household, the blended pride and delicacy with which he restrained all expression of the [Pg 345] feeling he entertained toward her, that might seem to seek to utilize and magnify her unguarded admissions on the witness-stand,—influenced, as he feared, by her anxiety lest her rejection of his suit should militate to his disadvantage in the estimation of the court. In truth, however, there was scant need of his reserve on this point, for she made no disguise of her sentiment toward him. It became obvious, not only to him, but to all with whom she spoke. Indeed, she would have married him then, that she might be near him, that she might share his calamities, even while his disgrace, his everlasting contumely, seemed already accomplished, and he had scarcely a chance for life itself. And yet, hardly less than he, she valued those finer vibrations of chivalric ethics to which his every fibre thrilled. "I know that you are the very soul of honor," she said to him, "and that this certain assurance ought to be sufficient to nullify the stings of calumny,—but I had rather that you had died long ago, that I had never seen you, that I were dead myself, than that your record as a soldier, your probity as a man, the truth, the eternal truth, should even be questioned."

Judge Roscoe, too, was infinitely dismayed by this strange blunder of circumstance, and flinched under the sense of responsibility, of a breach of hospitality, albeit unintentional, that his guest should incur so desperate a disaster by reason of a sojourn under his roof. [Pg 346] Baynell was constrained to comfort them both, but in the hope to which he magnanimously affected to appeal he had scant confidence indeed.

Even amidst the turmoil of his emotions and the crisis of his personal jeopardy he did not forget that the hand that hurled the bolts of doom had been innocent of cruel intent. "Never let her know," he warned Judge Roscoe, again and again. For although the testimony of the deaf-mute must needs have been elicited, she would be grieved to learn that she had wrought all these woes. Though literally the truth, it had the deceptive functions of a lie. It traduced him. It convicted him, the faithful soldier, of treachery. It hurled him down from his honorable esteem, and he seemed the basest of the base, traitor to his comrades, false to his oath, renegade to his cause, recreant to every sanction that can control a gentleman, and stained with blood-guiltiness for every life that was sacrificed in the skirmish by reason of his secret colloguing with the enemy.

Nevertheless, he tenderly considered how frightful a shock she would experience should she realize that it was she who had set this hideous monster of falsehood grimly a-stalk as fact. "But never let her know!" he insisted with an unselfish thoughtfulness that endeared him the more to those who already loved him. In that silent life of hers, so much apart, he would fain [Pg 347] that not even a vague echo of reproach should sound. In those mute thoughts, which none might divine, he would not evoke a suggestion of regret. One could hardly forecast the effect, he urged. A sorrow like this might prove beyond the reach of reason, of remonstrance, of consolation. She loved him, the silent, little thing! and he loved her. Never, never, let her know.

And thus, although in the storm centre all else was changed, swept with sudden gusts of tempestuous grief, now and again reverberating with strange echoes of tumults beyond, all a-tremor with terror and frightful presage, calm still prevailed in her restricted little life. But to maintain this placidity was not without its special difficulties. More than once her grandfather's deep depression caught her intelligent attention, and she would pause to gaze wistfully, helplessly, sadly, upon him. Upon discovering Leonora in tears one day she flung herself on her knees beside her cousin, and kissing her hands wept and sobbed bitterly in sympathy with she knew not what. Sometimes she was moved to ask the dreary little twins if aught were amiss, and when they shook their heads in negation, she promptly signed that she did not believe them. Once she came perilously near the solution of the mystery that baffled her. Missing the visits of Baynell, who of course was still in arrest, she asked the twins if he were ill, and when they hysterically protested that he was well, a shadow of [Pg 348]

aghast apprehension hovered over her face, and she solemnly queried if he were dead.

The phrase, "Never let her know," was like a dying wish, as sacred, as imperative, and Judge Roscoe hastily interfered to assure her that Baynell was indeed alive and well, and affected to rebuke the twins, saying that they were getting so dull and slow in the manual alphabet that they could scarcely answer a simple question of their sister's, and set them to spelling on their fingers under Lucille's instruction the first stanza of "The boy stood on the burning deck."

Thus the continued calm of her life was akin to the quiet languors of the sweet summer evening so mutely reddening in the west, so softly changing to the azure and silver of twilight, so splendid in the vast diffusive radiance of the soundless moon. All the growths were as speechless. The rose was full of the voiceless dew. What need of words when the magnolia buds burst into bloom without a rustle. With a placid heart she watched the echoless march of the constellations. The daily brightening of the sumptuous season, the vivid presentment of the great pageant of the distant mountains glowed noiselessly. Amidst this encompassing hush, in suave content she thought out her inconceivable, unexpressed thoughts, with a smile in her eyes and the seal of eternal silence on her lips. For his behest [Pg 349] was a sacred charge,—and she did not know,—she never knew!

The evidence on which Baynell had been convicted and which had seemed so conclusive to the general court-martial, present during the testimony of the deaf-mute and its subsequent unwilling confirmation by the other witnesses for the defence, was not so decisive on a calm revision of the papers. The doubt remained as to how much he could be presumed to understand from the peculiar methods of the dumb child's disclosure and the scattered haphazard comments of the household. The circumstances were deemed by the reviewing authorities extra hazardous, difficult, and peculiar. The matter hung for a time in abeyance, but at last the court was ordered to reconvene for the rectification of certain irregularities in its proceedings, and for the reconsideration of its action in this case.

The interval of time which had elapsed, with its proclivity to annul the effects of surprise and the first convincing force of a definite and irrefutable testimony, had served to foster doubt, not of the fact itself, but as to Baynell's comprehension of it. Perhaps the incredulity obviously entertained in high quarters rendered certain members of the court-martial less sure of the justifiability of their own conclusions. The maturer deliberation of the body accomplished the amendment of those points in the record which had challenged criticism, and the ripened judgment exercised in the reconsideration was manifested in such [Pg 350] modifications of the view of the evidence adduced that, although several members still adhered to the earlier findings, the strength of the opposing opinion was so recruited that a majority of the number concurred in it, and the vote resulted in an acquittal.

Hence Captain Baynell had again the stern pleasure of leading his battery into action. His pride never fully recovered its elasticity after the days of his humiliation, but his martyrdom was not altogether without guerdon. His marriage to Leonora, which was a true union of hearts and hands, took place almost immediately. Compassion, faith, the admiration of strength and courage in adversity, proved more potent elements with Leonora Gwynn than her appreciation of the prowess that stormed the fort.

Beyond his promotion and a captain's shoulder straps, Julius Roscoe gained naught by his signal victory. Although he seemed to meet his disappointment in love jauntily enough, he went abroad almost immediately after the cessation of hostilities in America, and still later attained distinction as a soldier of fortune especially in the Franco-Prussian war. Now and again echoes from those foreign drum-beats penetrated the tranquillities of the storm centre, and Lucille, looking over the shoulders of the other two "ladies," officiously opening the evening paper to discern some item perchance of the absent, would glance up elated at [Pg 351] the elders of the group, lifting her hand to her forehead with that spirited military salute, so expressive of Soldier-Boy.

THE END

---

and absorbing interest; a first-rate story ... sincere to the very core in its matter and in its art."—HAMILTON W. MABIE.

"The book is a bit of the living America of to-day, a true picture of one of its most significant phases ... living, throbbing with reality."—*New York Evening Mail.*

"Novels of its style and quality are few and far between ... he tells a story that is worth the telling ... it is a study of life as he sees it, and as thousands of his readers try to avoid seeing it."—*Boston Transcript.*

The Queen's Quair, or The Six Years' Tragedy

By MAURICE HEWLETT

Author of "Richard Yea-and-Nay," "The Forest Lovers," etc., etc.

Cloth 12mo $1.50

"Mr. Hewlett has produced in this book an enthralling work. It is at once a chronicle of certain momentous years in the life of his famous heroine and a searching study of her character.... 'The Queen's Quair' is profoundly absorbing, and no one among the novelists of to-day save Mr. Hewlett could have written it. No one else could have sustained such a long narrative on so high a level with such consummate art."—*New York Tribune.*

"No piece of historical fiction has so adequately described the career of the unfortunate and misguided Queen of Scotland, and no other writer has approached Mr. Hewlett in dramatic power and literary skill. He uses words that express his meaning precisely.... His conciseness of forcible expression is indeed admirable. The story, too, is full of action and commands undivided attention. Mary's portrait leaves a lasting impression."—*Boston Budget.*

DOCTOR TOM, The Coroner of Brett

By JOHN WILLIAMS STREETER

Author of "The Fat of the Land," etc.

Cloth 12mo $1.50

"A good story of the Kentucky mountains. The reader is caught at the start and held to the end."—*New York Sun.*

"One of the best and manliest novels that have appeared in a year."

—*Philadelphia Press.*

THE CROSSING

By WINSTON CHURCHILL

Author of "Richard Carvel," "The Crisis," etc.

ILLUSTRATED IN COLORS

Cloth 12mo $1.50

"Mr. Churchill's work, for one reason or another, always commands the attention of a large reading public."—*The Criterion.*

"'The Crossing' is a thoroughly interesting book, packed with exciting adventure and sentimental incident, yet faithful to historical fact both in detail and in spirit."—*The Dial.*

"Mr. Churchill's romance fills in a gap which history has been unable to span, that gives life and color, even the very soul, to events which otherwise treated would be cold and dark and inanimate."—Mr. HORACE R. HUDSON in the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

WHOSOEVER SHALL OFFEND

By F. MARION CRAWFORD

Author of "The Heart of Rome," "Saracinesca," "Via Crucis," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY HORACE T. CARPENTER

Cloth 12mo $1.50

"Not since George Eliot's 'Romola' brought her to her foreordained place among literary immortals has there appeared in English fiction a character at once so strong and sensitive, so entirely and consistently human, so urgent and compelling in its appeal to sustained, sympathetic interest."—*Philadelphia North American.*

"She is the most womanly woman Mr. Crawford has given us in many a day, and after her another peasant, bloody, brooding Ercole, is most alive."—*Boston Daily Advertiser.*

THE QUEST OF JOHN CHAPMAN

THE STORY OF A FORGOTTEN HERO

By NEWELL DWIGHT HILLIS, D.D.

Author of "The Influence of Christ in Modern Life," etc.

Cloth 12mo $1.50

"In this story Mr. Hillis has woven the life of the Middle West, the heroism and holiness of those descendants of the New England Puritans who emigrated still further into the wilderness. The story is of great spiritual significance, and yet of the earth, earthy—hence its strength and vitality.—*Montreal Daily Star.*

"No practised technist takes hold of his reader's interest with a prompter or surer grip than does this author at the very outset. Nowhere else in his book does he demonstrate his fitness for the work of fiction better than in the purely creative work. The style leaves little to be desired, for Dr. Hillis is, as we all know, a stylist. What perhaps is a surprise and also a pleasure, is the dramatic power revealed by the author. The book is forceful, its poetic opportunities are never missed, it is vivid and striking in its scenes, and pathos is a powerful element in the work."—*Brooklyn Daily Eagle.*

THE TWO CAPTAINS

A STORY OF BONAPARTE AND NELSON

By CYRUS TOWNSEND BRADY

Author of "A Little Traitor to the South," etc.

ILLUSTRATED

Cloth 12mo $1.50

The action takes place in the years 1793 and 1798. The historic incidents centre around the siege of Toulon in Southern France in 1793, in which General Bonaparte first attracts the attention of the world to his genius; and the epoch-marking Battle of the Nile in the Bay of Aboukir, in Egypt, in 1798, in which Admiral Nelson forever shatters the Frenchman's dream of empire in the East. The story revolves around the love of Captain Robert Macartney, an Irishman who is an officer in the English Navy under Nelson, and Louise de Vaudémont, granddaughter of Vice-Admiral de Vaudémont, a great Royalist noble and officer of the old Navy of France before the Revolution. One of the leading characters is Brœboeuf, a silent Breton sailor—he does not speak a dozen words in the whole story—who interferes at critical points to promote the welfare of the young lovers in most striking and unconventional ways. The coast of Provence, the land of the minstrel and the troubadour, the city of Toulon, grim-walled, cannon-circled, the blue waters of the Mediterranean, the great ships-of-the-line, the sandy shores of Egypt, the ancient city of Alexandria, the palace of the Khedive, the Bay of Aboukir, are the successive settings of the dramatic story. General Bonaparte and Admiral Nelson both take prominent parts in the romance, and the characters of these fascinating men are described with fidelity, accuracy, and brilliancy.

THE SECRET WOMAN

By EDEN PHILLPOTTS

Author of "The American Prisoner," "My Devon Year," etc.

Cloth 12mo $1.50

Rude and romantic characters, descriptions of lonely and picturesque Devonshire scenery, and a simple plot in which love and passion play strong parts, are part of the secret of Mr. Eden Phillpotts' very strong hold on the public. Slow-acting and slow-speaking but deep-feeling peasants play their parts in each drama amid a characteristically wild but sympathetic environment. The present powerful story shows the author at his best. The real tragedy is not in the actual murder and in the shadow of the gallows, but in the moral situation and the intense, engrossing moral struggle. Despite certain faults, each character in the story is of high mind and purpose, unselfish and deserving of respect. What might else be a gloomy theme is relieved by the minor characters. The talk of the Devonshire rustics is amusing, and every minor figure in the book is a distinct, true-to-nature character. The descriptions of external nature are done with feeling and knowledge; in this field no other living romancer equals Mr. Phillpotts. This work has some of the great qualities of serious literature—single in purpose, deep in study of motive and passion.

THE WOMAN ERRANT

Being Some Chapters from the Wonder Book of Barbara

By the author of "The Garden of a Commuter's Wife," etc.

With Illustrations by Will Grefé

Cloth 12mo $1.50

"This clear-visioned writer, calmly surveying life from the wholesome vantage ground of a modest, contented suburban home, is not merely entertaining each year a growing number of appreciative readers, but she is inculcating in her own incisive way much of that same wise and simple philosophy of life that forms the enduring charm of the essays of Charles Wagner."—*New York Globe.*

RECENT FICTION

Cloth 12mo $1.50 each

BARNES—The Unpardonable War. By James Barnes, author of "Yankee Ships and Yankee Sailors," "Drake and his Yeomen," etc.

A queer turn in the political game; a clever scheme in Newspaper Row; a perfectly plausible invention; these are a few of the elements of interest in this absorbing story.

DAVIS—Falaise of the Blessed Voice: A Tale of the Youth of St. Louis, King of France. By William Stearns Davis, author of "A Friend of Cæsar," "God Wills It," etc.

A quick-moving, interesting tale of the development of the young King Louis IX of France under the stress of a great crisis.

DEEPING—Love among the Ruins. By Warwick Deeping, author of "Uther and Igraine." With illustrations by W. Benda.

"A vigorous story ... told in the spirit of pure romance."

—*New York Evening Post.*

HOUSMAN—Sabrina Warham: The Story of Her Youth. By Laurence Housman, author of "Gods and Their Makers," etc.

A fascinating study of a woman's youth in one of the coast counties of England, a carefully drawn picture of ever interesting human types.

LOVETT—Richard Gresham. By Robert Morss Lovett.

"Goes forward determinedly from a singular opening to an unsuspected close, without faltering or wavering ... a very honest piece of workmanship."

—*New York Evening Post.*

LUTHER—The Mastery. By Mark Lee Luther, author of "The Henchman," "The Favor of Princes," etc.

A vigorous and convincing story of modern practical politics, so notably strong in its sense of reality as to give the reader the thrill of a privileged glimpse into the

mysteries of the one great game.

OVERTON—Captains of the World. By Gwendolen Overton, author of "Anne Carmel," "The Heritage of Unrest," etc.

An unusually fascinating book ... has the double attractive power of earnestness and a subject which compels sympathetic attention.

POTTER—The Flame Gatherers. By Margaret Horton Potter, author of "Istar of Babylon," etc.

"A wonderful romance of intensity and color."—*Book News.*

SINCLAIR—Manassas. By Upton Sinclair, author of "Springtime and Harvest," etc.

"In no single volume which we can call to mind have the undercurrents of feeling, so intense and so varied, that swayed men's minds in those troublous times, been so fully and well portrayed."—*The Times Dispatch* (Richmond).

WEBSTER—Traitor and Loyalist: Or, The Man who Found his Country. By Henry Kitchell Webster, author of "Roger Drake: Captain of Industry," "The Banker and the Bear," etc. With illustrations by Joseph Cummings Chase.

Mr. Webster's new romance is one in which love and war contribute a full quota of interest, intrigue, thrilling suspense, and hairbreadth escapes.

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

64-66 Fifth Avenue, New York

Transcriber's Notes:

The original text contains some arcane and inconsistent spelling and dialect. These have been preserved as far as possible.

Only obvious typographical errors such as letters being transposed havebeen corrected and hyphenation has been made consistent.

works, by using or distributing this work (or any other work associated in any way with the phrase “Project Gutenberg”), you agree to comply with all the terms of the Full Project Gutenberg™ License available with this file or online at www.gutenberg.org/license.

Section 1. General Terms of Use and Redistributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

1.A. By reading or using any part of this Project Gutenberg™ electronic work, you indicate that you have read, understand, agree to and accept all the terms of this license and intellectual property (trademark/copyright) agreement. If you do not agree to abide by all the terms of this agreement, you must cease using and return or destroy all copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in your possession. If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or access to a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work and you do not agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the person or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

1.B. “Project Gutenberg” is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg™ electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg™ electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation (“the Foundation” or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is unprotected by copyright law in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg™ works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg™ name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg™ License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg™ work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country other than the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg™ License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg™ work (any work on which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” appears, or with which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

> This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase “Project Gutenberg” associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg™ trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™ License terms from

this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg™.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg™ website (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that:

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, “Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation.”
- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.
- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.
- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain “Defects,” such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the “Right of Replacement or Refund” described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any)

you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you 'AS-IS', WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™'s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's website and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations ($1 to $5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate.

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations

from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our website which has the main PG search facility: www.gutenberg.org.

This website includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.