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The Old
Gentleman
of
The
Black Stock



by
Thomas

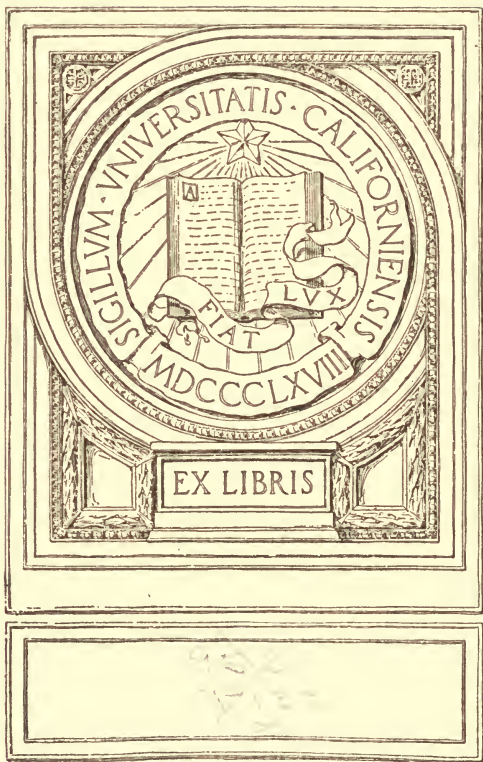
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THE OLD GENTLEMAN OF
THE BLACK STOCK

THE OLD GENTLEMAN
OF THE
BLACK STOCK

BY
THOMAS NELSON PAGE

ILLUSTRATED BY
HOWARD CHANDLER CHRISTY



NEW YORK
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1902

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THE
MUSEUM OF
THE HISTORY OF
MANKATO, MINN.

TO MY DAUGHTERS
MINNA FIELD
AND
FLORENCE FIELD
MY TWO MOST CONSTANT
AND
INDULGENT READERS

P R E F A C E

A*T the suggestion of friends who have expressed a wish to know more of the history of Elizabeth Dale than has been told, I have availed myself of the opportunity offered by the publication of this new edition of "The Old Gentleman of the Black Stock," illustrated by Mr. Christy's gifted pencil, to enlarge the story.*

I hope those who have done me the honor to accept the Old Gentleman of the Black Stock and Elizabeth Dale among their friends will feel that I have tried to add to their history in more ways than one.

It has been a grateful task. For the old section of that Ancient Town through which the Old Gentleman of the Black Stock moved gravely in the years when the lover-scarred

P R E F A C E

Beech shaded his tangled yard, and which Elizabeth Dale lighted with her presence, has quite passed away.

Cinderella's Coach comes along only in the Fairy-time of Youth.

T. N. P.

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FROM DRAWINGS IN COLOR BY HOWARD
CHANDLER CHRISTY



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THE OLD GENTLEMAN OF THE BLACK STOCK

I

A PRIMEVAL RELIC

HE was one of my first acquaintances when I came up to town to live; for I met him almost immediately after I gave up my country identity and melted into the sea of the city, though I did not learn his name for some time afterwards, and therefore knew him, as I found many others did, simply as, "the Old Gentleman of the Black Stock."

Why I spoke to him that summer morning on the shaded street I can readily understand; but why he spoke to me I did not know until long afterwards. I was lonely and homesick. I had not yet met any one except my cousin, who had given me a place in his law office,

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and was most kind to me, but was too busy a man to talk much; the two or three gentlemen, all older than myself, who had offices on our floor; and the few people who lived at the little private boarding-house in the old part of the town, where I had taken the tiny hall room on the third floor and furnished it with dreams. All of these last, too, were older than I, and seemed so very much older. At twenty-one a few years make such a great difference! Moreover, all the young people of my own age whom I saw on the street appeared to know each other so well,—just as I had known my own friends in the country,—and to be so entirely all-sufficient to each other, that it made me feel pushed out and shut off from all the rest of the world.

So, I remember that as I walked that morning down the shaded, quiet street with the old square houses on either side set back amid trees in their big yards, I had forgotten my

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dreams of the future, which had hitherto gilded my lone little room and peopled my quiet office, and was back among the overgrown fence-rows and fields of my country home.

It was then that I met for the first time the Old Gentleman of the Black Stock, and he spoke to me.

Of course, then, I spoke to him. I was ready to speak to any one; would have spoken to any one in the world. I had, indeed, not yet gotten over the strange feeling I had at not speaking to every one I met, in accordance with the civil country custom which made passing any one on the road without a bow a breach of manners.

This was the way of it:

I was strolling along the street that morning, looking at the old yards full of fine trees and shrubbery in a tangled and somewhat neglected state, which reminded me of the yard

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at home, and I had only half taken in the fact that just ahead of me out of the largest and most tangled of the yards, surrounding, perhaps, the oldest and most retired house on the street, had come some one—an old gentleman, who had paused just outside his broken gate, and turning half around, was now standing looking back at the trees behind him. I insensibly followed his eye, and glanced up at the trees myself as I walked along. There were three or four big locusts, two wide-branching elms, and one beech, all large and very old, and the beech quite gigantic. It was, perhaps, the sole relic of the primeval forest which once had clad these hills, and some tawny Tityrus might well have blown his wild pipe beneath its spreading shade. At least, it had known of other times far back; for on its massive trunk the scars stood thick telling of gentler strifes long past of which lovers had graved the histories deep in its hoary bark.

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The beech had a seat under it, and it was at this that the old gentleman's gaze seemed to be particularly directed.

The trees, too, reminded me of the country,—everything did,—and I suppose I must have had that in my face; for when I brought my gaze down to the ground again I was only a few paces from the old gentleman at the gate, and when I glanced at him I caught his eye.

I looked away; glanced at him again, for there was something about him which was unusual—quite as unusual as that square of old houses and shady yards in a growing city, and he attracted me.

He seemed just to fit in with them, and to be separated from the rest of the people I had seen: almost as separate as myself. So, when I looked at him again I tried to do it as if quite casually, and at the same time endeavored to take in as much of him as I could in my glance.

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The principal features which I noted were a tall, slender figure neatly clad in the manner in which an old gentleman of his age should be clad, with a black broadcloth frock-coat, somewhat, however, more flowing than usual, and a black stock up to the chin, with a high, white, unstarched collar falling over it, such as I remembered very old gentlemen used to wear years before, when I was a child, but such as I had not seen for some time.

This was all that I took in of his dress; for I caught his eye again as my glance reached his thin, high-bred, and somewhat careworn face, clean-shaven except for a white, carefully trimmed mustache. His eyes were gray and keen and were set back very deep under somewhat heavy brows, and I looked into them involuntarily.

He did not give me time to look away again, but spoke to me:

“Good-morning, sir:” — easily, pleasantly, —

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quite so much, indeed, as if he had known me, that it flashed across my mind, in the half-second which passed before I returned his salutation, that he had mistaken me for some one else.

I replied, however, "Good-morning, sir," and as a sort of apology for my stare, said, "You have some fine old trees there, sir," and was passing on with a somewhat quickened step, when he said :

"Yes, sir, they were very fine once, and would be so now, if they could escape the universal curse of Age.—You are fond of trees?" he added, as I paused to avoid the rudeness of leaving him while he was speaking.

"Yes, sir ; I was brought up amongst them."

I was going on to say that they carried me back to my home, but he did not give me time.

"They are worth loving: they last!—How long have you been from the country?" His deep eyes were resting on my face.

I was a little taken aback, for, apart from

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the fact that his abrupt question implied that he knew at a glance I was not a city man, I was sufficiently conscious of a certain difference between myself and the smooth young city fellows I met, to think that he meant to remark on my countrified appearance. So, with a half-formed idea that he might, if given the opportunity, explain himself differently, I simply replied:

“Sir?”

“How long have you been in the city?”

“Oh! about three weeks,” I said, with assumed indifference, and still feeling a little uncomfortable over the meaning I assigned him; and gradually getting somewhat warm over it, I moved to go on.

“Where are you from?” he asked.

I told him the county.

“Oh, I thought so!” He scanned me so boldly, and I fancied, rudely, that I said, quite shortly:

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“Good-morning, sir.”

He bowed :

“Good-morning, sir.”

It was only when I went over in my mind afterwards all the circumstances of the interview to see if I could find anything to soothe my wounded spirit that I recalled how gracious his manner was, and how courteous his tone as he returned my parting salute, and decided that he could not have meant to insult or wound me.

I found that he had made quite an impression on me. His appearance, his voice, his air, all remained with me, distinguished from those of the men I was now meeting.

I asked my cousin who he was, and attempted to describe him, but though I went into some detail and gave, I thought, a faithful portraiture of him, my cousin, who was a man about town as well as a lawyer in extensive practice, failed to recognize him from my description.

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In time I made acquaintances, and in further time yet, I secured practice enough to justify me in selecting more commodious quarters than those I had at first in my little hall room. And as I fell into city ways I began to visit about in society more and more, until I became quite as much of a city man, and, indeed, of a society man, as a still very modest income, coupled with some ambition to increase it, would allow. Yet I never met my Old Gentleman of the Black Stock in any of the bright houses I visited, or, indeed, anywhere else except on the street, and there only very rarely: perhaps two or three times at most in the two years which went by before I ever did more than acknowledge with a bow his passing and pleasant salutation.

II
THE HILL - AND - DALE
CARRIAGE

TWO years or so after the summer morning when I met the Old Gentleman of the Black Stock coming out of the shady yard on that old street—It was, I remember, in the month of May—I was passing down a busy street one morning, when a vehicle coming along attracted my attention. It was only one of a number of carriages that were coming down the principal driving street from the fashionable residence quarter of the town, and were turning into the chief shopping street of the city. But of all the number this one attracted my attention the most. For whilst the others were shining city equipages, with showy teams, and fashionable women lolling back in the easy and pretendedly indifferent style of ladies of fashion when they honor the trading

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section at the change of the seasons, who, if they knew me, condescended to acknowledge my bow with cold superciliousness, this vehicle, though I had never seen it before, was familiar to my mind and challenged my interest at once.

It was an old country carriage,—and as I walked along through the balmy spring-time air, which felt like feathers on my cheek, I had just been thinking before I saw it, of the country and of the little, willow-shaded stream with its deep pools, where I used to fish in spring when the leaves were tender like those above me, before I became a lawyer and a man of affairs. Just then the old carriage came swinging down the hill.

It was antiquated and high-swung and “shackling”; as muddy as a country wagon, and drawn by two ill-matched, though not ill-bred horses, spattered with mud to their ear tips, their long tails tied up in knots.

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It was driven by an old, gray-headed darkey wearing a low beaver hat, a high white collar, and a pair of yellow buckskin gloves.

It reminded me of the old carriage, with its old driver, Uncle Balla, at home.

But what struck me more than anything else as the vehicle passed me was that it was filled to the brim with fresh, young, country girls, who, oblivious of the restraining requirements of fashion, were poking their pretty heads out of the windows, three at a time, to look at everything on the street that struck their fancy, and with glowing cheeks and dancing eyes were chattering to each other in the highest spirits, showing their white teeth and going off into fits of laughter over the fun they were making for themselves. Whilst on the back seat a sweet-faced lady, with gray, smooth hair and a patrician profile, smiled softly and happily upon them, well content with their gayety and joy.

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They caught my eye, for I never saw more roses gathered in one carriage, and I had stopped and was staring at them open-mouthed, with a warm glow curling about my heart, and a growing tenderness coming over me as I gazed.

I suppose I must have shown this somehow. I may even have sighed, for I thought again of my fishing days and of laughing country girls I knew whom these were so much like.

One of them particularly struck me, and I was sure I had caught her gaze on me, when a hand was laid firmly on my shoulder, and a voice just beside me said:

“My son, when you want a wife, stop a carriage like that and pick one out of it. You might almost do it at random: you could hardly go amiss.”

I turned, and there was my Old Gentleman of the Black Stock. He was clad in white linen, as immaculate as fresh snow. I smiled



—Herald, Cheong Cheong Chriary

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my thanks to him and passed on, whilst he walked up the street.

I had not gone over two steps when some one touched me on the arm, and a gentleman, evidently a stranger in the town, said to me, "I beg your pardon; can you tell me who that old gentleman is?"

I turned, and he indicated my old friend, for at that moment I felt him to be such.

He was walking up the street quite slowly, with his head a little bowed, and his hands, holding his ivory-headed cane, clasped behind his back,—as lonely as an obelisk in a desert.

"No, I am very sorry, but I cannot," I said.

"Oh! I thought I saw you speak to him?" he said, with some disappointment in his tone.

"I did, but I do not know his name."

"I have rarely seen a more striking-looking man. He might have walked out of the pages of Plutarch," said he, meditatively, as he went on.

T H E O L D G E N T L E M A N

I do not know just how it was, but I found myself shopping all that day. As soon as I had gotten through with whatever I was doing, I went back up the street and began to search diligently among the throng of vehicles there for an old carriage with a pair of wiry country horses and an old negro driver wearing gauntlets. I went up square after square looking for it among the shining equipages with their pompous coachmen and glossy teams, and then, not finding it, went through the second shopping street.

But all was in vain.

It was plain that the driver was feeding his horses somewhere at a livery stable. So I went even so far as to enter three or four of the larger and more frequented dry-goods stores on the street in hopes of catching a glimpse once more of a pink face and a pair of laughing eyes which I had caught smiling at me out of the window of the old coach.

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I had wandered fruitlessly through several long floors, between aisles of women's backs of every shape and species of curve or stiffness, with attentive clerks or tired-eyed women standing over against them on the other side of the counters, and had just given up my search in despair and was returning somewhat downcast to my office, when I passed a milliner's window and happened to glance in. There were my rose-buds clustered together in front of a large mirror, my special one in the midst of the group, with a great broad-brimmed straw hat covered with roses on top of her little brown head, shading her fresh face,—making, as she stood before the mirror pensively turning her little person from side to side, one of the prettiest pictures in the world.

Fool that I was! I might have known that a girl would go first for a bonnet!

She must have received a compliment just then, though whether it was from one of her

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sisters or from the glass only, I do not know; for, at the same moment that she turned to her sisters, she suddenly smiled (thank Heaven! the sister stood on the side toward the window. I just loved her for it!)—a smile which lit up her face so that even the oversheltering hat with its lovely roses could not shadow it, but seemed only a bower for the lovelier roses beneath.—Lit up her face? It lit up the world!

I had become so engrossed with the pretty tableau that I had forgotten I might be seen from within quite plainly, and I stood staring at my young beauty through the window, open-eyed and open-mouthed, until I became suddenly aware that she was looking through the glass past her sister, and straight into my eyes. Then I gave quite a jump at my rudeness and rushed away. The look of embarrassment, almost bordering on horror, which was on her face as our eyes met, was all that I



—Howard Chandler Christy 1900

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saw, and I almost fled toward my office.

I learned afterwards that had I waited a second longer I should have seen her confusion give way to uncontrollable amusement over my flight. And I learned later that her mimicry of my sudden agitation was long the entertainment of her special circle.

If I fled, however, it was only a momentary stampede, which my growing ardor soon checked, and I stopped at the next corner, and crossing over the street took my post and waited to watch from a more secure quarter the exodus from that blessed Goshen.

I had not long to wait, for soon from the door sallied all together the three young nymphs, each under a new, very wide, and—I have no doubt—very beautiful straw hat. But only one hat now filled my eye—the wide-brimmed creation which served as setting for the charming flower-garden above the yet more charming flower-garden below, which

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even at that distance I could see glowing in the cheeks of the youngest, and possibly the tallest, of the three sisters.

They passed down the street arm in arm, laughing heartily, especially my little lady in the middle, at something—I learned afterwards it was at my sudden consternation and unexpected flight—and turned in at a dry-goods store,—one which I had already threaded that morning in my vain search for my unknown little lady.

If there was any common though unwritten law against a man's going into a millinery shop, there was, thank Heaven! none against his going into a dry-goods store; at least, if he could devise some want which he might possibly get supplied there. I had the want beyond doubt: that shop now held what within the last few hours I had come to want more than anything else on earth. But a sweetheart, if she were wholly unknown, as happened to be the

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case with me, would palpably not do; I could not ask for her. So I cudgelled my brains for something that I might demand if I were halted within.

I finally hit on neckties. Neckties have a sort of halfway place between a woman's wear and a man's gear, and besides, give time in the examination and selection. So, having made this resolution, I ventured in, and found the same rows of feminine backs—augmented somewhat since my last exploration by new additions—bending over piles of every conceivable stuff; and the same assiduous clerks and tired women standing as before on the other side of the counters engaged in a task as hopeless as telling Belshazzar his dream—telling women what they wanted when they did not know themselves.

As I passed on I heard many criticisms and not a few complaints—some harsh, some only petulant—from the women with backs, re-

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ceived, for the most part in silence, by the women without backs.

Suddenly I was startled to find myself quite close to the large hat with the roses which I now knew so well. It was forming a bower for the pretty head, at that moment bending over several pieces of some lawny, white stuff. The young lady's gloves were off, and the slender little hands were feeling the texture of the fabric with a touch as soft as if it had been a baby's cheek. Her face, which I could see in profile, was deeply serious.

"It is beautiful—beautiful. I wish I could get it," she almost sighed, "but I am afraid it is too dear for me; I have only so much to spend. Do you think you could possibly find anything a little lower and—almost as pretty, that you could show me?" She glanced up at the shop-girl before her with a little smile—I was going to say, almost pitiful; but the expression which came on her face as she looked

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into the tired eyes above her banished that.

“Aren’t you very tired?” she asked suddenly, with the sweetest, tenderest tone in the world. “I should think you would be.”

“Oh, it’s a pleasure to wait on you,” said the older woman, sincerely, her face lighting up as she turned away to her shelves, pleased at the tone of sympathy.

And who would not have thought so! I, at least, did; and overcome by a sudden feeling, as my young rose-nymph, whose face had lit up at the praise, turned to take a survey of the crowd about her, I, abandoning my idea of neckties, turned and hurried out of the store.

It was a strange feeling, delicious to me. I knew that I must be in love. I did not even know her name; but I knew her eyes, her voice, her heart, and they were enough.

As I came out on the street, there was the old carriage coming slowly along down, with

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the old driver leaning forward, looking anxiously to one side, as if to recognize some given sign.

“If you want a wife, stop a carriage like that, and take one out of it. Even taking one at random you can hardly go amiss,” had said my Old Gentleman of the Black Stock, and I believed him.

I could not resist the temptation to go up and render my first act of assistance to the family. I signed to the driver, and he stopped.

“You are looking for your young mistress?”

“Yes, suh ; mistis tell me to come and stop right by two big rocks in front of a red sto'. Dyah's de sto', but I b'lieve dee done move dem rocks. I see 'em heah dis mornin' when I went by!” He leant forward and gave another look.

“They are there still,” I said, recognizing the two carriage-stones by his description ; “but those carriages hide them.”

O F T H E B L A C K S T O C K

“Yes, suh ; I never see sich folks in my life. Dee ain’ got no manners in de worl’! Dee ’ll put dee kerridge right in yo’ way, don’ keer what you do! And dee won’ git out to save yo’ life. Mistis told me to be here by three, an’ —”

“Why, it ’s only half-past one now,” I said.

“Yes, suh ; but I likes to be sort o’ promptual in town! See dem kerridges by dem rocks now! I jes want to git in dyah once, an’ I boun’ dee oon git me out agin b’fo’ my mistises come. I don’ like dese city ways, an’ I never did like a citified nigger nohow! I got a right good ways to go, too.”

“How far do you live from town?” I asked him. I was growing guileful.

“In and about eighteen miles, suh. I start b’fo’ light dis mornin’. I comes from Colonel Dale’s ole place. ‘Hill-an’-Dale’ dee calls it.”

I knew at once then who my wild rose was. The Dales were among the best old families in

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the State, and "Hill-and-Dale" was as well known to our people as the capital city: one of the famous country places celebrated for generations as the home of hospitality and refinement.

Colonel Dale had died not very long after the war, from a wound received at Gaines's Mill, and had left a widow and a family of young daughters, whose reputation for beauty had reached me even before I left my country home, though I had never seen any of them, as "Hill-and-Dale" was in the farthest end of the county, quite fifty miles away from us.

"Well, they are in that store now," I said, to put the old coachman's mind at rest. "At least, one of them is."

"Is dee?" he asked, much relieved. The next second he gave a bow over my head.

"Dyah 's Miss Lizbeth now!" he said in some excitement, trying to attract her attention.

"Miss Lizbeth, Miss Lizbeth," he called.

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“Heah me, heah me.” But it was in vain.

I turned in some confusion ; but she was standing under her big straw hat just outside the door, looking alternately up and down the street, evidently expecting some one who had promised to come and had not.

My resolution was taken in a second, though to do it set my heart to thumping against my ribs.

“Wait,” I said. “I will tell her for you.” And I actually walked up to her, and taking off my hat, said, “I beg your pardon, but I think your driver is there, trying to attract your attention.”

“Is he? Thank you. Where?” she said so sweetly that my already bumping heart began to bound. Then, as I indicated the direction, and she caught the old man’s eye, her face lit up with that charming smile, which I can liken to nothing else but sunlight breaking forth on an already sweet and lovely prospect.

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“Oh, thank you,” she said again, tripping away, whilst I passed on to make it appear that I had only happened accidentally to see her driver’s signal.

I turned, however, a few rods farther on, as if quite casually, to get another peep at her.

She stood on the very edge of the curbstone, bending forward, talking very earnestly to her driver out in the street; but just as I turned she caught up her dress with a quick, graceful motion and tripped on tiptoe over to the carriage, showing as she did so just a glimpse of the daintiest pair of ankles in the world. Then the intervening carriages shut her out from view, and I went on.

So the name of my prize was Elizabeth Dale, and I had spoken to her!

I did not fail to pass along the street again—quite indifferently—a few minutes before three, and again at frequent intervals, until more than many minutes after that hour; but

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though "them two rocks" were there, a standing monument, and "the red store," hallowed by her having entered it, was there, and many other carriages came and went, the old coach from Hill-and-Dale came not, and neither did its pretty rose-and-sunshine mistress.

The street seemed quite deserted. The town was suddenly empty.

I went home to my boarding-house with new sensations, and if I was in love, I set all rules at defiance, for I ate like a ploughman, and slept that night like a log.

III

BASHAM MILES

I DID not meet my young lady again for a long time, nor shall I pretend that all this while I cherished no other image than hers in my heart. I certainly carried hers there impressed with great clearness for quite a period—for, I should say, several weeks, at least—and I always bore a sweet and pleasant picture of her, never wholly effaced, however much softened by the steadily intervening months.

But I found after a time that there were other eyes besides hers, and that other girls wore roses in their hats and roses under them too. So that although at first I formed all sorts of plans, romantic and otherwise, to meet her, and even carried one idea so far into execution as to purchase a handsomely bound set of Tennyson to send her anonymously, and mark one or two passages which described her aptly,

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and should compel her curiosity to penetrate my *almost* invulnerable anonymity, yet courage failed me in face of the questionable act of sending anything anonymously to a young lady whom I did not know, and after a few weeks I made another disposition of the poems, sending them without change of marked passages, and with a note which I considered quite fetching, to a girl whom I did know.

Still, no serious results came from any part of this, and I applied myself somewhat more faithfully to what I was now pleased to call "my practice," and never wholly forgot the old Hill-and-Dale carriage, with the pretty faces laughing together out of the windows, nor became entirely indifferent to the memory of the little Hill-and-Dale lady of the big summer hat and the large sunny eyes. If I ever saw a pretty face with a rose-garden above it, it was very apt to call up a picture of a milliner's window on a May morning. Or if

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I caught a glimpse of a pair of pretty ankles, I thought of a daintier pair, and a slender, girlish figure tripping with them out into the street.

And once or twice things occurred to remind me strongly of her. Once when I saw in a paper a notice headed, "A pretty Country Wedding at Hill-and-Dale," my heart gave quite a jump into my throat, and when I read that it was the eldest daughter who was married and not the youngest, I was sensible of a feeling of relief.

The sister had married an Episcopal clergyman, whom I knew by reputation as a fine, earnest fellow and a good preacher.

The notice went on to speak of the "well-known beauty" of the sisters, all of whom had acted as bridesmaids, and it mentioned particularly "the charming appearance of the youngest, Miss Elizabeth," whose character, it stated, was as lovely as her personal beauty might lead one to infer.

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The notice evidently was written by a friend. It went on to say that there was a rumor that "another fair sister" would soon follow the example of the eldest.

My heart had another flutter and sinking at this, and I could have cursed the vague writer for not giving some intimation as to which sister the report concerned.

Another occasion when I was reminded of the young lady was when I saw the published notice in a newspaper, of the sale of the Hill-and-Dale estate under a Chancery Decree. It seemed that the old place had finally gone to satisfy long-standing mortgages and later debts accumulated through the years.

This was later on though. I had been reminded of Miss Dale occasionally in the interim.

During the two or three years which had passed since my coming to town I had formed many new acquaintances in the city, and made some friends.

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I had, of course, in this time, not only learned the name of my Old Gentleman of the Black Stock, but had also come to know him personally. His speech to me on the street corner that May morning, when, with my heart in my eyes, I was looking into the old Hill-and-Dale carriage, had excited me enough to make me take the trouble to follow him up and learn his name before my interest in the incident subsided. Indeed, my office-boy, William Kemp, proved to be one of his old servants, and still waited on him.

I found that he was Mr. Basham Miles, one of the old residents of the city, and owner of the ancient house and tangled yard at the gate of which I had first encountered him, and where he still resided when he was in town.

He had once been a member of the Bar, and had had the reputation of being very clever, very eccentric, and very proud.

He lived alone when in the city, and took

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his meals at the house of one of his neighbors, an old lady, who lived next door but one to him. But he was away from town a good part of his time, both winter and summer, either visiting old friends in the country, summering at some of the smaller and more unfashionable watering-places, or travelling,—no one of my informants knew just where.

He had had a brilliant opening at the Bar ; for he was the son of one of the big lawyers of his day, a man who had stood at the head of his profession and had died with what was deemed even better than a national reputation—a State reputation. And he himself had been in partnership with one of the leading lawyers of his own time, a man who had died the recognized head of the local Bar.

Old lawyers still told juicy stories of the ability and skill of Miles and Thompson. But he had suddenly given up practice, abandoned the Bar, gone abroad, and—“dropped out.”

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No one of my informants knew anything further about him, even if they knew this; for it was only by piecing together bits of recollection and of old tradition at second hand, or Heaven knows at how many hands! that I got this much from the men of my own time.

Of course, there were other stories, bordering on or even touching the scandalous: echoes of old gossip so plainly pieced out and distorted that I will not even give them the currency of a denial.

There was one unvarying suggestion that seemed to occur often enough in the reports of my informants to reach the dignity of what is known to the Law as General Reputation. This was, that it was "something about a woman." Some said about one woman; some said two; some hinted at even more. Some thought it was a scandal; others said that it was a slander; some only had an idea that he was crossed in love, and gave up, soured and disheartened.

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The more numerous part credited the first story. Men are always ready to believe a vague scandal of a man, though they may deny a specific charge.

I was interested enough to investigate farther, for, somehow, the idea of associating the base life of a fribble or a debauché with my fine Old Gentleman of the Black Stock, with his thin, high-bred face, soft and spotless linen, and kindly, firm, gentle voice, seemed too repugnant to entertain.

His countenance was grave, it was true, but it was the gravity of one who had faced sorrow, not shame; his eye was melancholy, but it was calm, and his gaze direct; and his voice, which as much as either the face or the eye tells the true history that lies deep and unchangeable within, was grave and sad, but bore the unmistakable ring of sincerity and command.

So, unwilling to leave one who was somewhat linked in my mind with the object who

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at that moment engrossed my meditation (for I am speaking of the days succeeding the incident of the rose-filled carriage), I applied myself to the further and more careful investigation of these compromising echoes of vague tradition. And I learned that there was not one grain of truth in any story which imputed to the old gentleman the least act of dishonor or cast the faintest shadow on his history.

The two or three old members of the Bar to whom I applied answered my opening question in almost the same words.

I would ask them, "Tell me something of old Mr. Miles?"

"Miles? Old Mr. Miles? Basham Miles? What about him? He used to be a member of the Bar, and the best lawyer at it. He argued the case of Calthorp against Brown. Have you ever read his argument? It's the greatest exposition of— Where's the report? Give me that book, will you?" etc.

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“No. But why did he leave the Bar? Was there ever anything—ah,—out of the way about him—any story of—ah—?”

“About Miles? Old Mr. Miles? Basham Miles? Why, no! Who says there was? He was one of the highest men who was ever at the Bar. He left the Bar because— [Hunting through the book.] He gave it up because— Which?—Ah! here it is!—Listen to this.— Why, he gave it up because he didn’t need it—had plenty of money without it. I’d have done the same thing if I had been in his fix. I believe there *was* a woman had something to do with it—jilted him or something, and he never got over it.—Ah! here it is! [Reading.] ‘Calthorp’s Executor against Brown’s Administrator and others.’—Listen to this!”

And then would follow page after page of clear, lucid argument, which only a lawyer would appreciate fully.

“Why, sir, John Marshall could not have

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beat that! He made the Court reverse itself
by that argument, and established that for the
law! And I want to tell you that's not the
easiest thing in the world to do, young man."

This was what I got from three or four of
the oldest men at the Bar, and I stopped, sat-
isfied. I had established the fact, which I had
already believed, that if my old gentleman had
"dropped out," it was his own choice.

IV

AN OLD MAN'S INTIMATES

NOT long afterwards I met Mr. Miles. It was at the house of one of the old residents of the city, where I had become an occasional visitor, and where he had come that evening according to a weekly custom to play whist. He remembered me as his street acquaintance, and spoke of our first meeting at his gate, and our talk about the trees.

He made no reference, however, to the incident from which my chief interest in him then sprang. He evidently did not know I was the one to whom he had given the advice about stopping a country carriage for a wife.

The absence of some member of the family with whom he usually played whist seemed to cause him keen disappointment, and he appeared to regard it as so much of a misfortune

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that, partly through vanity and partly through complaisance, I was induced to take a hand.

I quickly found that I was "outclassed," and that the haphazard, "according-to-myself" game which I then played was worse than nothing. I misled him; forced his hand; lost him tricks, and finally lost him the rubber. This was more than he could stand. He would not play any more.

With a reference to "the rigor of the game," he rose from the table.

The rest of the time he stayed he talked about his health.

I was feeling a little aggrieved over his strictures on my game; but when he had left, my host spoke of him with so much affection, and my hostess with so much pity, that I was quite mollified, and meeting him on the street next day I stopped and spoke to him, asking him about his health, and taking occasion to apologize to him for my wretched performance

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the evening before, and the annoyance I had caused him.

He appeared not only pleased at my attention, but gratified at my inquiry as to his health, and not only expressed regret for giving an exhibition of what he termed his “constitutional irascibility,” but invited me to call and see him, excusing himself for “proposing so dull a duty” to a young man as a visit to an old one, by suggesting that he had a few old books and some other things, all old like himself, he said, which I might find of interest for a half-hour.

I went as I had promised, more from a sense of duty, I must admit, than from any other motive, even that of curiosity to see his old books.

But I found, as he had said, that he had a rare collection both of books and of other things,—the rarest I had ever seen,—and he himself seemed just a part of it.

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His house itself was a rare one: an example of the fine old double houses, built on a simple and dignified plan, almost square, with that adherence to the simple, classic models, adapted for room, sunshine, and air, which we now call "Colonial," perhaps because it is so long since we departed from them in the vain endeavor to be showy and fine. It was as different from the new houses near it as its master himself was from the other men on the street.

A handsome portico with Doric columns, once white, but now a soft gray, dignified its front. The fine door, with a large fan-shaped, leaded transom above and a brass lock strong enough to have secured the Bastile, was itself a feature, and admitted you to the ample hall, which ran entirely through the house to where the rear door and a long back double portico beyond it looked out on a tangled garden.

A stairway sufficiently wide to suggest am-
pleness in the rooms above led winding up on

THE
GARDEN



— Howard Chandler Christy, Jr. —

Baker

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one side of the hall to the upper floor.

The front door was not only equipped with a bell, which, when I pulled the handle, jangled for more than a minute somewhere to the rear outside the house, but it was garnished with a handsome, highly polished, old brass knocker of a classical design. Everything was solid, and had once been handsome, but struck me now as sadly out of repair. Indeed, an air of neglect and loneliness seemed to pervade the whole place.

It was not until I had both rung and knocked several times that an elderly negro woman came around the side of the house and, after looking at me with an air of inspection, asked whom I wanted to see.

I found things much the same way within that they were without. The walls were hung with paintings, some of which seemed to me fine, but they were dim and blistered, and the frames were all dingy and old.

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The room I was shown into was furnished with old mahogany furniture rich with age and was filled with handsome things; but everything appeared to me to be placed without regard either to fitness or comfort. The chairs were all ranged back stiffly against the wall, and vases and other bric-a-brac were scattered around in a pell-mell, hopeless fashion that was distressing.

The library, into which I was at length shown, was the only exception to this condition. It was large and airy and was evidently a living-room, and the fine old books, many of them in rich binding, redeemed everything.

Yet here likewise were the signs of neglect which spoke from every spot: books piled on tables and chairs, and even on the floor, in a confusion which nobody but one long familiar to it could have understood.

My host, however, who met me most graciously when I was at length shown into the

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library, seemed to divine where things were in that room, at least, and made my visit so agreeable that instead of passing one half-hour with him I spent the evening. He lived almost entirely in the past.

“An old man like myself,” he said, “has to live in the past. My friends are all there.”

He possessed a knowledge of books which appeared to me rare, and what was more, he had that delightful art of endowing books of which he talked with a certain personality which made them seem like living beings. He did not quote books so much as he made them speak for themselves. In his mouth they were not books, but the men who wrote them. He had evidently lived with them much. He brought their authors in and made them talk with you.

He appeared particularly fond of the Poets and the Essayists, though he declared there were very few of either nowadays who were sincere.

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“They are the true philosophers,” he declared. “When you find a sincere man in a book, sir, cherish him. He is like a sincere man in life: you know him at once, and he is *rara avis*. The old ones were sincere. There was something in the time that made men sincere. Shakespeare, of course” (I remember he said), “because he knew the Human Soul, and could not help it. It was as if he had stood face to face with God, and dared not tell anything but Truth.

“Milton was sincere, because he was a fanatic; Bacon, because he was too wise not to be.”

Of the moderns, he said, old Johnson was almost the only Essayist who was always sincere, and that was his value. You could always count on him. He was, moreover, “a man of heart; a clear, vigorous man who saw straight, and told it as he saw it.”

The others were: “Nearly all posing, writing either for popularity or for some other miserable end.”

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“Why, sir,” he said, “I have piles of them there I will not even put on my shelves; I will not admit them to the companionship of gentlemen. The poets, at least, try to do something; some of them do. Goldsmith, for all his fopperies, was sincere, because he was a poet. His pen inspired him. It was the key that turned on the divine fluid. Johnson said of him, you know, that no man was more foolish till he took up his pen, or more wise when he took it up. Wordsworth was always sincere for the same reason. They had a high idea of their profession, as poets and preachers must have.”

I asked him about Carlyle and Emerson, for I was just then discovering them. He admitted the sincerity of both; but Carlyle he did not like.

“He is always ill-tempered and sour, and is forever sneering at others. He is Jeremiah, without his inspiration or his occasion,” he said of him. “He is not a gentleman, sir, and

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has never forgiven either the world or himself for it."

"Do you not think he writes well?" I demanded.

"Yes, sir, he writes vigorously,—I suppose you mean that,—but it is not English. I do not know just what to term it. It was a trick with him, a part of his pedantry. But when I want acerbity I prefer Swift."

Emerson he put on a much higher plane than Carlyle; but though he admitted his sincerity, and ranked him as the first American literary man, he did not read him much.

"He is a kindly man," he said, "and has 'wrought in a sad sincerity.' But he preaches too much for me, and he is all texts. When I want preaching I go to church.

"At least, I do when I can find it," he said after a pause. "That is not so often these days."

His eyes kindled.

"The Pulpit has lost its power, sir: thrown

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away its best prerogative—the gift of preaching. The Clergy no more preach with power, because they no more believe with strength. They find many of the old dogma undermined and worthless, and think the whole structure is tottering. So they set to work to build up the entire fabric anew. They waste their puny strength laying a few sticks about the foundation. They do not apprehend that deep down lies the solid rock unshaken, and that on this alone Man's spiritual nature craves to rest. The Roman Church knows this. It is wise, for it is the garner house of experience.

“Why should I go to hear a young man, of far less knowledge than myself, holding forth to worldly people worldly considerations to induce them to embrace a religion of which the founder preached the blessedness of Sorrow! The poorest preacher, sir, is impressive so long as he believes himself the Minister of God. I may not accept his message, but if he believes

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in his mission I shall respect him. If, however, he questions his own credentials I will not listen to him.

“But I am getting to preaching myself,” he said, with a smile. “We were speaking of the Essayists?”

“After all,” he said, “the best of these Essayists to me is the first, Plutarch; and next to him the second, Montaigne. Plutarch is as modern as if he had just written, because he knew Human Nature. Human Nature is always the same. Montaigne drew from Plutarch, and the others from Montaigne. They have all been pillaging him ever since he wrote. He was a man who knew himself as he was, and had the wit and the courage to be truthful. Montaigne was not so great as Plutarch, because he was less spiritual. His time was not so great. But he knew the Human Mind, as Shakespeare knew both the Mind and the Heart. Why, sir,” he added, with unwonted enthusi-

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asm, "I am enough like Montaigne to be his embodied spirit. When I read Montaigne I feel as if I were reading myself. It is a pleasure to me to know that they are the two which we have some grounds to believe Shakespeare read.

"You cannot get a man nowadays to tell you what he really feels or thinks. Feeling has gone out of fashion. Every one is trying to repress his feeling, and he does not think at all. Convention has taken the place of Originality. Why, sir, we are all trying to say what we think our neighbor thinks."

It does not seem to me now, recalling it, that what he said was altogether sound, but there was something about his manner in saying it which impressed me. He appeared to be in strong opposition to the rest of the world, and to hold a correct position, but to have a tendency to push his views to extremes. He did not see things precisely as they were, but through a medium or atmosphere of some kind

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which threw them a little out of line, as if a man might look at objects through a pane of old, uneven glass.

I observed the same tendency when he spoke of old times and things. His talk of old days was delightful, but even this was critical, his reminiscences being, I thought, all a little tinged by something—I would not call it sourness, but just a bit off from the sweet savor of perfect mellowness,—as if at some period he had been shut off a little too much from the sun, and had ripened under the shadow of Disappointment.

When I came away he accompanied me to the door, and his last words surprised me:

“Young man, Domestic happiness is worth all the Fame in the world!”

It was a cry out of the dark.

I left him with something of sadness, passing out of the wide, cheerless hall and through the old weather-blistered door, and I was not

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aware until I got into the sunshine without, how chilly I had been within. I had an indescribable feeling of half sorrow, half pity for the old gentleman, which did not change until I met him again out-of-doors, calm, dignified, and serene, with his courtly manner.

I also had a feeling of sadness for myself. I came out of his presence half in love with a picture of a young girl in a flower-trimmed hat—half in love with a memory.

I met the old gentleman occasionally after that, and always with a feeling of mingled regard and sympathy. I could hardly tell why I had this feeling; for I set him down as one of the most self-contained and fortunate of men—a man who, with enough means to gratify his tastes and follow his own bent, chose to live just as he pleased.

In fact, I think I began rather to envy him, for my little affair in which the missent Tennyson figured had not ended very satisfactorily

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to me: the vicarious recipient of the volumes had smiled more kindly than I liked on a smooth-cheeked young man who had an undeniable advantage over me in the silkiness of his mustache, the freshness of his complexion, and the nimbleness of his heels, not to mention the matter of income, in which he probably quadrupled mine. But I not only believed these were the only advantages he had over me, but was conceited enough to have even a mild contempt for him, which, nevertheless, did not prevent my young lady from at first openly favoring him, and afterwards bestowing on him not only herself, but my Tennyson as well, side-marked passages and all.

I had not even the poor consolation of thinking that he would see the passages and be jealous, for I do not believe he ever opened the book, or, for that matter, any book in his life. Yet when I saw them together they were happier than two turtle doves.

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Anyhow, the affair left me with a certain feeling of discontent, not only with the world at large, but—a much harder thing to bear!—with myself also, and I rather envied my Old Gentleman of the Black Stock his quiet, untroubled life.

About this time the vision of the little country girl with the big rose-covered hat began to come back to me again, and took its place once more in my recollection.

V
OF THE FRAGRANCE OF
ROSEMARY

DURING these years I had come to know many elderly people in the town besides the old lawyers and Mr. Miles,—among them several old ladies. I have always had a fancy for old ladies. I was brought up in the house with a number of them, and as I am fonder of little girls than I am of boys, so old ladies appeal to me more than old men. They fill a place in life that would be quite bare without them. There is a certain something about them quite indescribable. They make much of the mellowness of life, and not a little of its fragrance. Some of them have a beauty with which the beauty of the most radiant belle can hardly compare.

But it is not of this beautiful class only that I speak. Even when they are faded and worn,

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when all tints have vanished and all lines have subsided, with Age which is content to acknowledge itself graciously as Age, and does not pretend to a belated Adolescence, there is a charm all its own. There is a fragrance of rue and of rosemary, as well as of roses and violets, and thyme and lavender have their sweetness no less than heart's-ease and lilies.

There were more of these old ladies in my city than anywhere else I ever knew, and I had come quite naturally to know a number of them. They seemed to be found fittingly in the older and cheaper part of the town, where the ancient, once comfortable houses still lingered, though it was no longer fashionable, or most convenient, and as my practice had not yet enabled me to emigrate to the desirable new quarter, I had quite naturally met a number of them.

There are certain characteristics which are common to them all. They all dress in black;

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they all live in the past, and talk of your grandmother as if she were your aunt, completely forgetting your mother; and they all smile on the little children they pass in the street.

I am rather fond of children myself, and have always followed a habit of making friends with those on my street, a practice from which I have at times found certain conveniences to follow. There are some inconveniences, of course,—for instance, in seasons of snow, and also at other times,—but they are inconsiderable.

Occasionally at those recurring seasons when tops come like winged ants on warm days in swarms out of the ground, or from somewhere else, I had to submit to the ignominy of being stopped on the corners, and compelled to display my inability to make a top do anything except flop around on its side like a headless chicken, before a party of young ruffians, every

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one of whom could “plug” a top with diabolical accuracy, or could “whip” it high in air and bring it down whirling like a buzz-saw.

Or I would be held up on the sidewalk by a gang of curly-haired footpads and compelled, against my strongest protests, to jump a rope held by two of a group of pestilent little creatures, who would shout with laughter as they knocked my hat off in the dirt, threw sand into my eyes, and on my retreat pursued me down the street with jeers of derision.

Or I would have to play a game of marbles, while I lost, or stood the chance of losing, a client as well as the game.

But, on the whole, I think this had its compensations, and my acquaintance with the old ladies and the children in my quarter played an accidental part in my knowledge of the history of the Old Gentleman of the Black Stock.

Oftener than once, indeed, as I was playing

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with the children, he came along and stopped
to look at us.

“Lucky dog!” he said to me once as he
passed. “I would rather be able to play mar-
bles than to play monarch.” And he went on
his way rather slowly.

VI

BASHAM MILES'S HISTORY

BUT this was the way I came to hear of his history.

I was calling one evening on an old lady, whom I knew as a friend of my mother's, and who had been good enough to call on me when I was sick once, and another old lady happened to come to see her whilst I was there. Her visit, as I recollect, was to tell her friend of some old schoolmate of theirs from whom she had lately had a letter, and who had sent Mrs. Gray a message in it. She had brought the letter with her, and the two friends read it, and talked about the writer,—who they both agreed must be older than either of them by several years,—and about her family and history. And then they drifted back to their girlhood, when they all three had been together at the Springs one summer. It was forty odd years before; yet

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they went over it all, recalled incidents, got them straight between them, discussed and enjoyed them again, down to the partners they had, the flowers they had been given by them, and the dresses they wore at the ball: all as if it had been yesterday.

They had grown young again.

In the course of their discussion the name of Basham Miles occurred more than once.

One of them declared that some incident occurred "the summer Basham Miles was so attentive to Betsey Green." The other thought not, but that it was the summer after; and she tried to refresh her friend's memory by reminding her of two immense bouquets their friend Betsey Green had had, one of which they thought Basham Miles had given her, whilst they could not make out who had given the other. And then it had turned out that Basham Miles had given her neither, but had given his to Anita Robinson, whom he had just met, and

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whom he danced with that night; and one of Betsey's had been given her by an old gentleman from South Carolina, for whom she had sung, and Burton Dale had "come back" and given her the other. "And that was the beginning of his success," she said.

The circumstance was remembered, but it failed to fix the year in my friend's memory.

Then the other said:

"Why, don't you remember, that night I had on a lilac mull, and you had on a white embroidered muslin?"

"Oh, yes, to be sure!"

This fixed it. The girl's white muslin recalled it, with all its long attendant train of circumstances, after nearly fifty years of activity and change.

"My! my! How long ago that was!—And yet it seems only yesterday!" said my friend quietly, softly passing her thin hands over her black dress.

Her eyes were no longer looking before her, but back at the Past.

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I wondered as I observed her, what she was thinking of in that forty odd years where lay embalmed and folded away so many things,—love-making, marriage, wifehood, motherhood, widowhood, age;—perhaps (for the thin hands still smoothed softly the old black dress) of the girl's embroidered muslin, and the young girl it held in its fresh folds that night. Her thoughts were not painful, whatever they were, for a pleasant and placid air rested on her face, and when she at length emerged from her reverie it was with a gentle smile.

“Yes, it was a long time ago!”

Her friend, too, had been looking back into the Past.

“What a handsome man Basham Miles was then!” she said, reflectively.

“I never thought so; there was always a self-consciousness about him which marred his looks to me,” said my friend.

“Oh, I think he was a perfect Adonis! I won-

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der if he has ever regretted not marrying? I think he was really in love with Betsey.”

“No, not he!” said my friend. “He was too well satisfied with himself. I am very sure Betsey never thought he was in love with her. I would n’t give Burton Dale, with his kind old heart, for a hundred of him, with all his cleverness.”

The conversation had interested me, and I had sat still, putting off my departure, and feeling a certain interest in their talk and the train of reflections it had called up in me. Still, I did not put the parts together; I simply felt vaguely rather than saw anything which concerned me personally. I had certainly never thought of old Mr. Basham Miles as an Adonis, or as a careless and arrogant heart-breaker, and I followed the novel idea off into reverie and vacancy.

I was recalled by the mention of the name “Hill-and-Dale.”

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The old lady who had worn the "lilac mull," and who was much the haler of the two, was speaking softly, and I had lost a part of the conversation.

"Yes," she said, "her health has been very poor ever since the birth of her last infant, and then her mother's death, just after Hill-and-Dale was sold, told greatly on her; so she does not get to see me as often as she did when she first came to live here, last spring."

"I must go and see her," said my friend, softly. "I will try and get there to-morrow." She looked away out of the window.

"I would have been before, but I walk so badly now, I find myself putting things off. She brought her youngest sister to see me not very long ago—very like Betsey! I could almost have thought it was Betsey herself as she sat by me and talked to me. You remember that way Betsey had of stroking your hand when she was sitting by you talking earnestly?"

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“Elizabeth? Yes, she is like Betsey. But not so pretty,” said the other old lady, putting up her spectacles with elaborate care and rising to leave.

“I thought she was rather prettier; but then I see so badly these days. Good-bye; you must come again. Don’t wait for me to come; I can’t walk much, and—”

“Oh, pshaw! Malviny Gray, you have been trading on those three months of superior age to me ever since we went to school to old Mr. Persico when you were twelve years old, and I am not going to put up with it any longer. You are as arrogant about it as Basham Miles used to be about his intellect! Good-bye.” And they kissed, laughing at their pleasantry and going over many new things and some old ones, and starting to take leave of each other, and beginning again over and over, as is the way with their sex of every age.

I myself was leaving; so I handed the visitor

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down the steps, and asked to see her home; but she positively declined this attention, declaring smilingly that I would think her "as old and helpless as Malviny Gray."

I, however, insisted, declaring guilefully that my way lay in the same direction with hers, though I had not the least notion where she lived. And she finally yielded, and I learned afterwards was much pleased at my attention. In fact, I have found that it is the small incidents not the great ones that make up life.

As I went home I saw Basham Miles turn in at his gate a little before me. His great-coat collar was turned up, and he had a comforter around his neck, although the air seemed to me quite bracing, and as he slowly climbed his broad steps and let himself in at his old stained door, I thought he appeared more than usually feeble.

VII
IN WHICH BASHAM MILES
LOSES HIS HAT

I DID not meet the old gentleman or see him again on the street for some little time. But one day as I turned into a new street, which had been cut through and built up recently, I saw a figure some distance ahead of me all muffled up and walking with the slow and painful steps of an old man.

When I was still about half a block from him his hat blew off and was caught in a sudden gust of wind and whirled out into the street.

He stepped slowly down after it, but before he could reach it a young girl, who had evidently seen him through a window, opened the door and ran down from one of the little new tidy houses on the opposite side, tripped out into the street and caught the truant hat

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and restored it to its owner. And then, as he attempted to wrap his comforter, which had become disarranged, more closely around his neck, she reached up and wrapped it deftly about him herself, tucking it in with great care, and, as he thanked her warmly,—which I could see even at a distance,—she turned, laughing, and tripped back across the street, her brown hair blown about her little head, and ran up the steps into her house, giving me just a glimpse of dainty ankles, which reminded me of Elizabeth Dale that sunny day so long ago.

I had recognized old Mr. Basham Miles at a distance as his hat blew off, but I did not recognize the young lady who had rendered him the kindly service. Indeed, I did not see her face. I was sure, however, that she was a stranger, for I knew every girl on the street, by sight at least.

I was so busy speculating as to who the



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graceful stranger was, and looking at her windows as I passed, that I forgot my intention to overtake old Mr. Miles, who might have told me, and he turned the corner before I could catch up to him, and went down a cross street, so that I did not get a chance to speak to him. He was walking more rapidly than I had thought.

As I was late, I thought it was just as well, for I had observed that when I met him on the street now he talked more and more about his health; and my chief regret at not having caught him was that I did not learn who the dainty-looking girl was.

As it turned out, I discovered later that he did not know her.

The next time I met him he referred to the episode himself and asked me to find out who she was, and let him know.

“She reminded me strongly of some one I knew once—of an old friend of mine,” he said,

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half reflectively. "These resemblances are very curious." He was speaking now more to himself than to me.

I suggested that I might find some difficulty in discovering her.

"Difficulty?" he said. "Why, sir, when I was your age I knew every pretty girl in town!" He looked at me keenly.

"Was she pretty?" I asked. "I did not see her face."

"Pretty! She was a beauty, sir! She looked like an angel. And she is a lady. I don't know that a man is a judge of the beauty of a person who runs after and catches his hat for him," he added, his deep eyes lighting faintly with a little half-gleam of amusement. "What between rage and gratitude he is not in a very judicial temper. But she seemed to me a beauty; and she resembled one who was a beauty. Yes, sir, she was a beauty." And he sighed and turned away.

VIII

OF A MAKER OF MUD PIES

ONLY a day or two after this conversation—I am not sure that it was not the next day—I happened to be passing along a little street out in the same direction with, but several blocks beyond, the quarter where my old friend and I had our residences on the border of respectability. The ground was so broken there that the street was not half built up, and such houses as there were were of the poorest class.

As I passed along my attention was attracted by a little crowd gathered around some object in the middle of the street. They were shouting with laughter, and my curiosity prompted me to go up and look to see what amused them.

I found it to be a very small and dirty little boy, who certainly presented an amusing enough spectacle.

He was so little that it was wonderful how

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so much dirt could have found lodgment on so small a person. His clothes were good,—better than those of the children around him,—but were covered with mud from top to bottom, as if he had been making mud pies—which, indeed, he had been doing—and had proposed to bake them on himself. His hands were caked with mud, and his round face also was plentifully streaked with it. Where it showed through, the skin looked fair and the face delicate and refined. He might have been a muddy Cupid.

He did not seem at all disturbed or even disconcerted by the crowd about him, or the amusement he was causing, or the questions put to him. All of them he answered promptly and with perfect coolness. The only difficulty was in understanding him; he was so small that he could not talk plainly. And, besides, he was very busy with a most attractive pile of wet sand.

There is something in wet sand which no

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man-child can resist. I wonder if it is not a shred of our heredity, from the time when we burrowed in the ground.

“What is your name?” they were asking him.

“Urt’n Ale Avith,”—indifferently; for he was much engaged.

“What?”

“Urt’n Ale Avith,”—in a different key, while he gave a swipe across his face which left new streaks.

“What?—Urt’n Ale Avith?”

“Nor! Urt’n—Ale—Avith!”—with some impatience.

They changed the question.

“Where do you live?”

“At ’ome.” He returned to his task, the boring of a small tunnel with one little black finger.

“Where is that?”

“At ’ome!”—evidently struck with their denseness.

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"What street?" asked some one.

"Witchen Cheet."

"Witchin Street?"

"Nor! *Witchen* Cheet!"

"Where is that?" the crowd inquired of each other. No one knew.

"What did you leave home for, honey?" asked a woman, stooping over him and putting her hand on him.

"Wunned away!" he answered promptly, with a reawakening of interest, and a sparkle in his blue eyes at the recollection.

"Runned away?"

"Mh—hnh," with a nod of satisfaction, and a dimple at the corner of his little muddy mouth.

"What did you run away for?"

"I d'n' know."

He stood up.

At this a child who had worked its way into the inner circle about him gave a shrill explosion of laughter. Little Mudpie's face flushed

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suddenly, and he walked up, and doubling his dirty fist, struck the child as hard a blow as he could, which caused a universal shout, and set the children to whirling in the street, screaming with laughter.

For the first time the boy showed signs of distress; his little dirty mouth began to pucker and his little round chin to tremble, and he dug one chubby black fist in his eye.

“Warn do ’ome,” he said, in a low voice.

“Yes, you shall go. Don’t cry, honey.” And several women, pressing around him, began to pet him. One of them asked: “Don’t you want somethin’ to eat? Ain’t you hungry?”

“Mh—hnh—Yes, ma’am,” he said, with a little whimper and correction of his manners.

“All right: I’ll give you something. Come along, and then we’ll take you home.”

On this several women with motherly kindness began to talk as to which could give him something quickest.

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“Which way is your home, little man?” I asked, taking advantage of the break in the crowd.

He turned and waved his little arm, taking in half the horizon.

“Dat way.”

At least, it was the half of the horizon toward which I was going, so I said to the women that if they would give him something to eat, I would undertake to get him home safely. This division of labor was acceptable, and the woman who had first suggested feeding him having given him two large slices of bread covered thick with jam, and others having contributed double as much more, I took the little stray’s wrist in default of a hand,—both of those members being engaged trying to hold his store of bread,—and having taken leave of his friends, we started out westward to find his home.

We had not gone more than fifty steps when

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he said, "I tired," or something as near that as a mouth filled with bread and jam would allow.

This was a new phase of the case. I had not counted on this. But as there was no help for it, when he had repeated the statement again, and added the request, "Pee tote me," I picked him up, dirt and all, and marched on.

It was a little funny anyhow to find myself carrying such a bundle of boy and mud, to which was added the fact that every now and then lumps of blackberry jam were being smeared over my clothes and face and stuck in my hair, a process to which the warmth of the day did not fail to contribute its part; but it was only when I got into my own section of the town that I fully appreciated the humorousness of the figure I must cut.

I would gladly have put my little burden down, but he would not be so disposed of.

Prosperity is the nurse of Arrogance, and

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under prosperity my little man had grown a tyrant, and whenever I proposed putting him down, he said so firmly, "No, no; I tired! pee tote me," that I was forced to go on.

The first person I met that I knew was old Mr. Miles. He was muffled up, but yet was walking somewhat more vigorously than when I last saw him on the street. He stopped, in apparent doubt as to my identity, and looked rather pleased as well as amused over my appearance, but expressed no surprise when I made a half-explanation.

The child, possibly touched by his pale, thin face, but more probably sensible of his sympathy, suddenly held out his chubby, black hand with a piece of jam-smear'd bread in it, and said, "Warn tome?"

It manifestly pleased the old fellow, for he actually bent over and made a pretence of biting off a piece.

When I left him I took a side street.

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I was going to a police station to learn if any notice had been left there of a lost child, but as I passed through a rather retired street, to avoid observation from people I might know, I heard a musical voice behind me exclaim :

“Why, Burton! Where on earth have you been?”

Something about the voice struck me like a memory from the past. Turning, I stood face to face with Elizabeth Dale. Had she been an angel I could not have been more overcome.

The three or four years since I had seen her in the milliner’s shop had added to her beauty; had filled out her slim, girlish figure, and had given thoughtfulness to her rosy face and made it gracious as well as sweet.

She was too much engrossed with the child, whom I quickly discovered to be her nephew, to notice me at first, and I found myself abandoned by my charge, who immediately deserted me, leaving, however, abundant traces

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of himself on my person, and climbed into the
outstretched arms of his pretty aunt without a
word, and began to hug and kiss her with all
his might. Nor did I blame him. In fact, I
should have liked to be as small as he, to have
enjoyed the same blessed privilege.

As she turned half away from me, with the
boy in her arms, I recognized her on the in-
stant as the handsome girl who had picked up
old Mr. Miles's hat for him that day in the
street.

The joyousness of her nature was testified
to in her peals of laughter over her little
nephew's extraordinary appearance, and her
loveliness of character was proven both by the
affection with which the child choked and
kissed her, and the sweetness with which she
received his embraces, muddy and jam-be-
smeared as he was. All she said was: "Oh,
Burton! is n't that enough? You'll ruin aunty's
nice dress."



Illustration by E. C. Christy 1900

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But Burton only choked and kissed her the harder.

I offered to take him and relieve her, but she declined this, and Mudpie would not have come even if she would have let him. He knew when he was well off. He just clung the closer to her, patting her with his chubby hand, and rubbing his dirty cheek against her pretty one with delightful enjoyment, saying, "I 'ove my aunty,—I 'ove my aunty."

And as she smiled and thanked me with her gracious air for my part in his rescue, I began to think that, faith! I more than half did so, too.

The next day I met Elizabeth Dale on the street, entirely by accident—on her part. I may almost say, it was accidental on my part also, for I had been walking up and down and around blocks for two hours before she added her light to the sunshine without.

She was gracious enough to stop and give

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me a message of thanks from her sister, Mrs. Davis, for my kindness to her young prodigal, and she added that if he had not eaten of the husks of the swine, he had, at least, looked as if he had played with them.

It was a memorable interview for me; for it was the first time I ever had what might be called a real conversation with Elizabeth Dale. I was guileful and stretched it out, claiming, I remember, a much closer acquaintance with the Reverend Peterkin Davis than I had ever thought before of doing. She even said her sister had written and posted me her thanks, but had commissioned her if she saw me again, to say she would be very glad to have me call and give her "the privilege of thanking me in person"; so she was pleased to express it.

After that, of course, I felt I could do no less than call, and I was so gracious about giving her sister "the privilege" she requested, that I called that very evening; and as her sis-

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ter happened to have a headache, and I saw only the younger sister, I called again only a few evenings afterward. For by this time Miss Elizabeth Dale and I were friends, and I now think I was almost beginning to be more.

I became suddenly a somewhat regular attendant on the Reverend Dr. Davis's church.

IX
THE CARVED HEART

I DID not see old Mr. Miles, to tell him that I had discovered his young benefactress, for Youth is forgetful in the sunshine of prosperity, and I did not call on him immediately.

One afternoon as I passed along his street he was sitting out on the seat under the old beech tree, all muffled up in his overcoat; but I was going to pay a call on "Witchen Cheet," and was in something of a hurry, so did not stop, and when I was thinking of getting ready to call on him some time afterward, William Kemp told me he had left town for the summer.

I did not think of him again for a long time. My thoughts were so occupied; for I was not the only person that stayed in town that summer. Miss Elizabeth Dale was there also, and though she went off once, to my great discon-

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tent, to visit some relatives in the country for a few weeks, she was in the city most of the summer.

It was astonishing how completely her absence depopulated the town and how equally her presence filled it. I heard other men speak of the city being deserted, but after she returned I did not find it so.

I do not think that I ever thought of being in love with her as a practical matter. I never dreamed of the possibility of her being in love with me. She was far too beautiful and too popular ever to think of a poor young lawyer like myself. In fact, marriage was something on which I might dream, but I had never seriously contemplated it. I thought I should marry some day, as I thought I should die some day, but I certainly had never thought as yet of marrying Elizabeth Dale. My dream then was rather of an heiress and a large mansion, as it had formerly been of a princess and

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a palace; and meantime I lived in the third floor of a small boarding-house, and never dreamed that Elizabeth Dale would think of me for a minute. As far as I went was timidly to send her flowers, or worship her beauty and hate furiously every man who had the impertinence to look at her.

But Summer is a dangerous time in a Southern city. The true life of the South comes out only in Summer. Then it flowers. Then the verandas become drawing-rooms, and receptions are held on the front steps. It is one of the reasons why life in a Southern city is easier than in a Northern one. It is no groundless superstition that gives the Moon a power to affect the Mind. The Providence that tempers the wind to the shorn lamb, made the Summer for the portionless girl. Given soft white raiment and the moonlight of a Summer night, the Summer girl need ask no favors of her satin-clad winter sister.

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How I blessed that summer for the ease with which I met Elizabeth Dale! If I used to see her almost every evening, stroll with her on the shady streets, row on the placid river, read to her, think of her and plan for her a great deal more than I did of my practice,—which of late had really grown, as was quite fortunate for the little florist at the corner above me, though it was still far below the large and lucrative business which was to be my stepping-stone to the chief-justiceship,—it was only as of a beautiful being whose mere smile was more than all other rewards, and all that I dared aspire to. It was enough for me to live in the same town with her.

As will be seen then, I was not at this time in love with Miss Elizabeth Dale; I only admired her, and hated those who were.

Almost the only time I thought of old Mr. Miles that summer was one evening when Elizabeth Dale and I were strolling through

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the old street on which his house stood. She was arrayed in a simple white dress, as angels and young girls should be, and she carried a large pink rose, which I had selected with some care for her at my little florist's. I had hoped that she would wear the rose, but she did not; she only carried it in her hand.

As we passed slowly along, exchanging the pleasant trivialities which two young people deal in in such cases, the old yard stretching back looked cool and inviting under its big trees. The seat under the old beech looked convenient and sequestered, and an air of quietude and calm seemed to rest on everything. I suggested going in, which surprised her, but I told her the owner was a friend of mine, and was absent from the city, and then informed her that he was the old gentleman whose hat she had picked up in the street.

The gate was tied up, and I was about to cut the fastening, when she said she would climb

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over it, which she did, with my aid, with the agility of a fawn.

She must have seen the look of surprised admiration on my tell-tale face, for she said, with mounting color in her cheeks:

“Country training. I fear I never shall get used to city ways.”

“Heaven forbid!” I said.

We wandered about for a while, and then came to a stop under the old beech, which showed on its gray, scarred trunk the rough traces of many a schoolboy’s pride or lover’s devotion. As we looked at it, she gently stuck my rose in her dress.

Most of the carving on the trunk was old, for few entered that secluded yard of late, and much was indecipherable.

One pair of broad initials, high up, enclosed in a large heart, I made out as “B. M.” and “E. G.”; but my companion did not entirely agree with me. The “B. M.” she thought I

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was probably correct about, but as to the "E. G." I was only possibly so.

"Those letters would stand for my mother," she said softly. "Only she was always Betsey."

"Or they might stand, 'For Example,'" said I, with the light wit of a young man. "Now, if I just cut 'D.' after that, and change the 'B. M.,' it would be all right. I should have followed the example."

"Why, it would be like sacrilege!" she said, her large eyes resting on the tracing above us. "Whoever they were, they were, no doubt, two lovers, and that old scar may be the only trace left of them on earth."

I wished, as I glanced at her, I could have caused the look in her eyes as they rested on those relics of that far-off romance.

I do not know whether it was that our conversation began to grow a little too grave after that, but she suddenly decided that we had

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better be going home, and notwithstanding my protests, she rose and started.

This was the only time she went with me into the old yard, though I often pressed her to go again, and it was the only time I remember that we ever spoke of old Mr. Miles.

I mentioned to William Kemp that I had visited the grounds, as he was in some sort their custodian.

“Yes, suh, I see you,” he said. “Jes’ mek yo’self at home.”

This was all he said, but it suddenly made me feel as if William were my confidant.

X

SHOWING THAT LOVE IS STILL A NATIVE OF THE ROCKS

AS the summer passed and the autumn came, I began to grow restless and unhappy. The trees had lost their greenness, and the town was taking on its autumn look. And my happy summer evenings, with strolls along the moonlit summer streets, or drifting out on the river, were gone with the greenness of the leaves, and something had come like a frost over me and my happiness.

I could not tell just what it was, unless it were the frequent visits to town of a young man, named Goodrich, who lived in another State and a larger city.

I had met Mr. Goodrich once or twice in the early summer, and had thought nothing of him: not as much as I thought of several

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others who used to sit on Mrs. Davis's front porch on "Witchin Cheet" and interfere with my enjoyment there; but now he was back in the city, staying at one of the biggest hotels, and spending most of his time—all of it, I declared—at Mrs. Davis's.

I never knew before what Diogenes felt when Alexander came between him and the sun.

I met this Alexander every time I went there, and though I do not think I would ever have been base enough to murder him, I would cheerfully have seized and dropped him into some far-off dungeon to pass the rest of his natural life in painful and unremitted solitude.

My hostility to him was not at all tempered by the fact that he was very good-looking, had good manners, and was reported to be exceedingly rich; nor even by the further fact that Miss Dale was going off somewhere to teach that year, her scholastic term beginning a month or two later than usual, on account of

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the absence in Europe of the lady who had engaged her.

I gave myself so many airs about Mr. Goodrich's "continued business" (for such was the cause assigned for his protracted stay among us), and made myself so generally disagreeable,—a faculty which I possess in a high degree of development on occasion,—that finally Miss Dale, on some exceptional outbreak, gave me clearly to understand that she would put up with no more of my arrogance, and sent me about my business.

The exact cause of our rupture was as follows:

I had for some time, whenever I called on Miss Dale, either found Mr. Goodrich settled comfortably in the little veranda—"Planted like a tree!" I termed it,—or soon after I had taken my post, he appeared with the regularity of a sidereal body.'

I would not have admitted that I was jeal-

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ous of him to save his life, and in my present frame of mind, hardly to save my own. But jealous! I was jealous of the wind for toying with her hair and of the sun for bathing her in its light.

Naturally, as I know now,—perversely, as I thought then, certain members of Miss Dale's family threw no obstacles in Mr. Goodrich's way. I asserted that they brazenly pursued him, and I always sat lance-in-rest for them, a course which came near being my undoing.

Heaven, however, after some chastening, was good to me.

My rival, like most young men, was full of himself. He had travelled, and he loved to talk of his experiences and was not unappreciative of his possessions. He would spend lavishly on some personal gratification and then skimp over some little thing which instinct should have made him do generously. I saw the joints in his harness and aimed my shafts dexterously.

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I viewed with inward rage his deliberate investment of what I now deemed my especial prize ; but I treated him outwardly with malignant courtesy.

I avow this deceitfulness now, because I found him afterwards a good fellow.

It was only occasionally that I treated myself to the luxury of a direct thrust.

One evening, one of the members of Miss Dale's household, who I thought espoused my rival's side too warmly, and was too much given to talking of him in Miss Dale's presence, was telling of his experience with London tailors. Mr. Goodrich had, according to this faithful historian, had some clothes made in London, during "his last visit there," which had fitted him perfectly there ; but on his arrival here, strange to relate, he had unaccountably found them too small for him. The lady could not account for it. I, whose excursions had hardly been ever more than "from the

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blue bed to the brown," using another's wit, hazarded the conjecture that possibly Mr. Goodrich was not as big a man in London as he appeared to be here.

This, after a moment, served to change the subject.

I was not, however, always as happy as this.

In Love, as in Diplomacy, a blunder is sometimes worse than a crime. I had committed the grave blunder of falling too deeply in love to act with judgment. Like "the shepherd in Virgil," I had "become acquainted with Love and found him a Native of the Rocks."

I was, in fact, much more deeply sunk in that tenacious soil than I was aware of; and all the while that I fancied I was angling for my young lady, she had me securely hooked on her silken line, and having wit enough to know it, amused herself with me to her heart's content.

A woman's heart is a strange anatomy.

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*“He little kens, I ween, a woman’s breast,
Who thinks that wanton thing is won by sighs.”*

So wrote one who knew something of the subject.

We learn, however, only from experience, and though I knew Byron, I did not know my young lady’s heart until I had had experience of it. So seeing how tender it was towards all animate things, I vainly fancied it would be tender towards one who would have put his heart under her feet. But I found it adamant. And until the magic spell was called that could open it, it remained fast shut with all its hid treasures. She walked serenely through all my worship, and I devoured my heart in secret, and cursed the one I deemed the cause of my misery.

For any sign she gave, she might never have had an idea that I cared for her, more than for the Statue of Liberty which adorned the arms of the State.

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Having no means to outshine my rival in any material way, I determined to eclipse him by display of my intellect.

I had at times written to my young lady what I was pleased to call "poems." I now polished up one of these and sent it to her. But as I wished to derive the full benefit that surprise would bring when she should discover the identity of her poet, and also, perhaps, a little because I was a trifle shy, as all true lovers are, I wrote the copy of verses in a disguised hand and sent them to her anonymously. They were as follows :

LINES TO CLAUDIA:

*It is not, Claudia, that thine eyes
Are sweeter unto me,
Than is the light of Summer skies
To captives just set free.*

*It is not that the setting sun
Is tangled in thy hair,*

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*And recks not of the course to run,
In such a silken snare.*

*Nor for the music of thy words,
Fair Claudia, love I thee,
Though sweeter than the songs of birds
That melody to me.*

*It is not that rich roses rare
Within thy garden grow,
Nor that the fairest lilies are
Less snowy than thy brow.*

*Nay, Claudia, 't is that every grace
In thy dear self I find ;
That Heaven itself is in thy face,
And also in thy mind.*

When I called on her next evening I fully expected her to make some allusion to my poem which would lead me after a little to avow my authorship. She did nothing of the kind. At length I deftly introduced the sub-

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ject of poetry; but not even then did she betray the least idea that I had sent her a poem. I was in some doubt whether she had received it; until she asked me suddenly, why I supposed men sent things anonymously.

I said I supposed they did it because they wanted the person to whom they sent them to have them and it was pleasure enough to know that they had received them.

On this she asked me if I knew Mr. Goodrich's handwriting.

I said I did not; but I thought she ought to know it.

She reflected a moment, and then with her eyes far away on the horizon, said she would have thought so too; but what she referred to was in a disguised hand and so she could not be sure.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Oh! just a copy of verses; and very pretty verses they are."

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I said, "I did not know he was a poet. But perhaps he was inspired?"

"Oh! no;" she laughed, "I would not go so far as that, though they remind me a little of a poem of Sir Charles Sedley's :

*'Not Celia that I juster am,
Or better than the rest—'*

"You remember that poem?"

I said I remembered it.

And this was all the thanks I received for a poem into which I had poured my melted heart.

Yet she possessed one gift which I can call little less than a sixth sense. She divined with fatal instinct the exact moment at which to vouchsafe me a kindly word, a sympathetic glance, a sunny flash. And Minerva never dealt her grains of balm with more divine precision.

A thousand times I swore to myself that

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summer that I'd put up with no more of her caprice, and on each occasion, just when I prepared to put my resolution in force, she shattered it with a single shaft.

I told her once that had she lived in past times, she must have been burnt as a witch, unless haply I had been there to rescue her. Whereat she laughed in that musical way she had, which a sidelong flash of her eye always sent home. And after pretending that I had paid her a very left-handed compliment, till I was almost pushed to make it broader, she said:

“Even had I been a witch, sir, you would never have rescued me. You would have begun to bluster at the door and offer to fight all comers, and so would have been overwhelmed at once and never even have known my true friends who might have planned my rescue.”

I knew she meant Goodrich, and I was all

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in a heat at once, and, no doubt, glowered. I
know I sniffed, though I did not know it until
I saw the twinkle of delight in her eye.

Wild tribes give victims to their squaws to
torture. Civilization, after all, has not made such
vast strides! It is the method rather than the
motive that has changed. Human Nature does
not change much. My witch practised upon one
of her victims with exquisite ingenuity, though
Truth compels me to say he was a fair mark.

I fancied about this time that my favored
rival was engaged successfully in planning the
witch's rescue, and I was in what might be
termed "a state of mind." He was always on
hand.

I began to give myself airs, which no doubt
were mighty amusing to my young lady till
they touched her nearly.

At length, I became quite intolerable.

Having failed all through the Harvest Moon
—that amber moon which makes more harvests

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than those gleaned in the fields of corn—to secure even a moment of her undivided company, I grew at first morose, then actually savage, and on the first opportunity I had, took my lady to task : brought her to book.

It was a moonlit night—just such a night as that must have been in which young Lorenzo and pretty Jessica, in the Belmont glades, tried to “outnight” each other with all the classic tales of lovers’ histories they could recall, from Troilus down, making the final poem on moonlight for all time.

The moon as on that night shone bright.

“ . . . *The sweet wind did gently kiss the trees
And they did make no noise.*”

And as I walked beneath the moon-bathed, wind-kissed trees toward the spot where my Jessica waited, my soul was filled with love for her, and I vowed, if Heaven vouchsafed me the chance, that very night to swear I loved her

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well and steal her soul with many vows of faith, and every one a true one.

When I arrived, the coast was clear, and possibly there was hope that it might remain so. The other members of the family were not at home, and my hated rival for that night, at least, was out of the way, for he had been riding with Miss Jessica Dale that evening and had gone off.

Jessica, in a white muslin, looked divine. As she took her seat at the darkened end of the balcony she mentioned casually, in reply to some observation of mine at my unwonted good fortune, that Mr. Goodrich had left immediately after tea : "He has some very important business."

Her air was that of possession.

It was this air that inflamed me.

"His business is doubtless very important?"

"Yes?"

She was so quiet that I took her silence for confusion and grew more bold. Even then, had

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Prudence but tipped Reason a wink, I might have been saved; but finding the way so easy, my Boldness became Insolence, and I forgot myself and overstepped all bounds.

I suddenly found that I had committed the fatal blunder of attacking my rival. I had driven her to defend him.

This was bad enough! But I made it worse. 'T is said that against Stupidity the gods themselves are powerless. I demanded to know why Mr. Goodrich was always there.

"Mr. Goodrich has business here," she said again, with a little lift of her head which I might well have heeded.

"Important business! and he seems very successful in it."

"Yes—I hope so."

"Doubtless!"

A pause followed this, during which I gathered steam. She sat in silence in the dusk. I took it for conviction.

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I determined to fire one more shot to make sure of victory and then I would be magnanimous.

“It is not only the Poor, but the Rich we seem to have always with us.”

She rose without a word and walked slowly into the house.

Had she moved rapidly I might have hoped. I knew, however, as she passed in at the window that my hopes were dead, slain by my own folly.

I was ready to follow and seize her and offer amends, my life, my contritions—everything. But she gave me no time. She did not pause. She passed through the room and out of the door, and the next moment I saw her climbing the stair slowly, but with the graduated motion of a piece of machinery.

I sat for a moment and pondered, and then, with a revulsion at the empty chair and empty room behind me, rose and walked out of the gate and down the street.

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The sounds of jollity and of happy family life came to me from moon-bathed yards and shadowed verandas. Children flitted about, chasing each other with subdued laughter and with little cries of ecstasy; young couples strolled by under the maples, their voices lowered to soft murmurings.

“How silver-sweet sound lovers’ tongues by night.”

I alone was in darkness; I only was alone.

The world was happy, but for folly I was banished—banished by my own folly! For me there was “no world without Verona-walls.”

As I passed by old Mr. Miles’s house, the yard with its great trees lay bathed in the moonlight; but it was empty and silent. A dim light in one of the up-stairs windows alone showed that the house was the habitation of life. But it appeared only to emphasize the loneliness.

I wandered about the streets until the life

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all withdrew and vanished within doors, and only I was left. I even went back and traversed the street on which stood the little house where I had been so happy a few hours before. As I looked at it from the opposite side, it was dark and silent like all the rest. The chairs we had occupied were still on the balcony, but they were empty effigies of life.

It was a strange feeling, as I thought how for blocks and blocks, covering miles, in those sealed brick boxes lay hushed and unconscious as in their tombs all the thousands who but a few hours before made the teeming city alive. I only was awake,—unless it were some night-prowler threading his way like a fox through tombs; some watchman keeping vigil like a watcher by the dead; some sick person tossing on a bed of languor. It suddenly made me feel closer to the ill and desolate than ever before. I seemed like a lonely sentinel on a solitary outpost guarding the slumbers of the world.

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The moon began to redden as it sank lower in the sky, and it disappeared in a long bank of cloud before it set. The morning broke rainy and dismal.

With the daylight, however, my spirit returned, and after breakfast I began to think there might be hope. I decided that I had been treated badly and she must apologize. I waited all day for a note. But none came. Every step on my stair set my heart to beating. But there were no notes.

About noon I decided that I would go a little further. I would give her an opportunity to apologize. So I was weak enough to go around to that part of the town, as if casually, on the chance of seeing her. I did see her, at a distance. She was driving with Goodrich! This gave me a revulsion. She was a heartless creature!

I went back to my office and to gloom.

Next day the light again inspirited me. I

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would meet her halfway. So after writing a dozen notes, conveying every shade of disapprobation, and consigning them to the wastebasket, I started out to play my new game.

I had, however, counted without my cost. Miss Elizabeth Dale was not to be thus toyed with. I had struck too deep, and the arrow rankled. My first overture met a rebuff so serious that I was completely floored. When I called she was excused.

I freely confess that even after this I would have been mean enough to tumble down in the dirt and eat ever so much humble pie, if I had thought it would have done any good. The young lady, however, was so inexorable in her indignation that I found not the slightest ground for hope that she would relent and accept my apologies, though I sought one with the diligence of Esau. I was, accordingly, forced to assume the "High horse" as my sole salvation; which I did with what out-

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ward grace I might, though I was inwardly consumed between consternation, regret, and rage, and cursed Mr. Goodrich heartily.

The "High horse" is sometimes, perhaps, a successful steed, but it is mighty poor riding; and I spent an autumn as wretched as my summer had been delightful, passing my time meditating insults to my successful rival and punishment for my young lady. It was a sad autumn.

Sorrow is somehow related to Religion, and in my gloom I began to think of becoming good.

Providence helped me once.

I heard one evening of a poor woman who, with a house full of little children, had been left destitute by the death of her husband in a railroad accident. He had been an engineer, and had run into a "washout," one night after a heavy rain. He had seen the danger ahead, and had had time to jump, his fireman, who escaped, reported; but after reversing his lever

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and applying the breaks, he had stuck to his engine, "to put sand on," and had gone down under it. The only "sand" in that engine was not in the box.

Hall came from my county, and that was always a tie with me. So, though I was not much in the way of charity work, and though the weather was what Basham Miles would have called "inclement," I went down to see if the woman was in as great need as I had heard she was in.

I had some difficulty in finding the little frame house in the street which was full of such houses, all as much alike as those which the maid had to pick between in Ali Baba's history.

It was, by the way, the same street in which I had found my little mudpie-maker making his pies that day so long ago.

At length, however, a poor woman, whose face instantly grew sympathetic when I men-

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tioned the name of the widow, pointed me to the house. I found the family not destitute, indeed, of food, for Hall had been "a saving man," but yet in a sad plight, as might have been expected. I recognized the widow at the first glance as the woman who had fed the mudpie-maker with bread and jam that summer day: though grief had sorely changed her appearance.

Every one was kind, she said. At the mention of my name her countenance lightened, and she said she had heard of me, and had meant to write to me, as a lady had told her to place her case in my hands, and maybe I could get some money for her from the Company.

I told her I would look into the matter; but, regretfully, I had to inform her that she had no case in law against the railroad.

I went again, however, and was enabled to take her a small fund which two or three sym-

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pathetic friends, moved by the story of her sorrow, had contributed. When I knocked, the door was opened by Elizabeth Dale.

I should not have been more surprised had I walked into a new sphere. But the ways of women are wonderful. She was as calm and self-possessed as though she had proof that my post was always on Mrs. Hall's front door step. She shook hands with me as naturally as if she had expected to meet me there, and we had parted only the evening instead of the autumn before.

"How do you do?" Then looking back into the dim little room behind her :

"Mrs. Hall, here is a gentleman to see you. Can he come in?"

I heard an affirmative answer, and she stepped aside.

"Won't you walk in?"

As I entered she said, "I am glad Mrs. Hall has so good a friend." And before I could

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reply, she had passed out of the door and closed it behind her.

I felt suddenly as if I were shut up in a cave. My visit was a hurried one. When I opened the door a minute later I caught a glimpse of her at the top of the street, and just as I looked, she disappeared. She was walking rapidly.

Mrs. Hall's praises of her cost me all the money I had in my pocket, and a night's sleep in the bargain.

It was she who had recommended me as a lawyer.

Though after that I obeyed the Scriptural injunction and visited the widow and the fatherless more than once, and though Miss Dale visited them frequently, as I heard from her charges, yet I never met her there again.

Truly the ways of a woman are past finding out.

XI
A WARNING AND AN
EXAMPLE

“SWEET are the uses of Adversity,” no doubt. But for all that, it does not commend itself to a young man, if Adversity happen to take the form of a particularly pretty girl’s refusal to see him when he happens to think her the one girl in all the world for him.

I was enabled to make this observation from experience.

I tried “Adversity’s sweet milk, Philosophy”; but to no purpose. I found it crabbed and hard, as ever the roughest pagan found it.

I summoned Reason to my aid, and plainly proved how foolish my view was. Women could not be so unlike each other, I argued. I pointed out the folly of ruining my happiness and my life because, forsooth, one woman of all the countless myriads in the world refused

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to be my mate,—a girl whom only two or three, or, at most, a half-dozen men thought in any way superior to the rest, and in whom all the others saw no more than in any fair face, soft voice, gentle air, and kindly ways. The chances were—I clearly showed—that I was wrong, the rest of Mankind right.

All to no purpose. My coolest summing up of judgment went down like straw before my heart's advocacy in the simple reply, "I love her."

I was bewitched. I knew it, and yet I could not stir.

Although at times I raged against myself like a poor beast tangled in a net, I knew I was hopelessly caught, and for the most part submitted dumbly.

Unfortunately for me there was no war then in progress, or I should probably have gone and left the obdurate creature to repine for having missed the imperishable laurels I should

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gain, and mourn too late the fatal madness of driving such a Paladin of courage to despair.

I thought of going West, and reaping there the large rewards of my abilities; but I doubted whether civic spoils would touch her, and I hesitated to take a step which would proclaim my defeat.

I knew enough of war to know that after a battle he that sleeps on the field is held the victor, though he may have suffered most.

So, though stricken sorely, I held the field, and faced the world.

Adversity winnows one's friends like a sieve. I first lost happiness, then appetite, then sleep. They follow each other like the numerals, 1, 2, 3. I, who had never known what it was to be conscious of an hour between the time I went to bed and that when my alarm clock awoke me, any more than if I had crossed the bed from night to day, now thrashed around for hours and vainly waited with stout resolution

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and firmly closed eyes the coming of Sleep. I never knew before how stealthy is Sleep, or how coy. My friends began to remark to me on my changed appearance; at least, those whom I might term my second-best friends did so, to my annoyance. My closest friends only looked anxious and tried in secret, easily discoverable ways to divert me.

Some of them went so far as to try to find another girl for me. But "surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird." I could not be caught even with so fair a bait as they proposed. "Thisbe" was "a gray eye or so; but not to the purpose." I felt that my case was different from all the others in their lexicon of experience. Like the man in the grammar, I would be destroyed, no one should help me.

Time, however, is the great helper. He works with a secrecy that steals through our alertest watch and overcomes our stoutest defences. He gives the buried seed help to burst

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its shell and make its way up to the light. He lends his aid to soothe the sorest hurt. And, as he helps to knit the lacerated flesh, so he helps to heal the deeper wounds of the spirit.

In time my pride awoke, and did what my friends had not been able to effect. Then accident helped me even against my will.

Among my friends was one in whose society I had always found a great deal of pleasure. She was no more like Elizabeth Dale with her extremes of cruelty and sympathy, her pitfalls of sauciness, her unexpectednesses, her infinite variety and unvarying charm, than I was like St. Francis of Assisi. But she was clever, intelligent, and high-minded. And she was very sympathetic with me. I saw a great deal of her, and was aware that my friends were associating our names.

As Miss Elizabeth Dale was now off teaching, I had no fear of her hearing too much of my consolation.

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Winter had now come to the rest of the world, as well as to my heart, and Winter always gives courage. Christmas was approaching. A freeze gave us the coveted opportunity to skate, and I took my friend skating. As we were returning across the fields and reached a fence on the roadside, she complained that one of her hands was quite numbed by the cold, and I undertook to warm it by rubbing it, though it was cold work. I was engaged in the dismal task when she gave a little exclamation and quietly drew her hand away. I glanced up just in time to see Elizabeth Dale look away as she came down the hill. The next second she turned her eyes our way and gave us a smiling greeting. She had just come home for the holidays. My friend laughed at my discomfiture. It was just my luck.

In my time of tribulation I began to think of many persons and things that I had rather forgotten in the times of my prosperity, and

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among them was old Mr. Basham Miles. I had not seen him on the street during the whole fall, as I generally did at that season of the year, and one day I asked William about him. He told me that he was at home ill; he had come back from the country sick, and had been confined to his room ever since.

“Fact is, suh, I’s mighty troubled ’bout him,” said the old servant. “He ain’t gittin’ no better: jes gittin’ punier an’ punier. I don’ b’lieve he ’s gwine to last much longer.”

This was serious, and I questioned him as to what the old gentleman did.

“He don’ do nuttin’ sep’ set dyah all day in de big cheer,” he said. “He use’ to read—read all de time, night an’ day, but he don’ eben do dat no longer!”

“Who is with him?”

“D’ ain’ no-body wid him, suh. He won’ have no-body. He never wuz no han’ for havin’ folks ’bout him pesterin’ him, no-how,

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—strange folks expressly; he would n' even have a doctor to come to see him, after old Dr. Thomas die. *He* used to come sometimes. Since den he would n' have no-body; but me and Jane got him to le' me go and ax Dr. Williams to come an' see him, an' he say he pretty sick, an' gi' him some physic. But he would n' teck it, suh! He say he gwine die anyhow, an' he ain't gwine take no nasty physic. He got de bottle dyah now in he room, an' it jes full as 't was when I bring it from de drug-sto'!"

I said that I would go and see him.

"Yes, suh, wish you would; maybe he would see yo', and maybe he won't. He mighty fond o' you. He won' see many folks. Several ladies been to inquire after him, and Mrs. Miller, she and annur' lady too, sen' him things; but he won' see no-body, an' he won' eat nuttin'. I's right smartly troubled about him, suh."

I was troubled, too, and repeated my intention of calling to see him.

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“I tell you, suh,” the old servant said suddenly, “a man ought to have wife and chillern to take keer on him when he git ole, any’ow!”

I had not thought of this view of the case before, but it did not strike me as wholly unreasonable.

When I called to see Mr. Miles that evening, he received me.

I was shocked to find what a change there was in him since I had seen him last.

I was shown through the cold and dark hall, and by the vacant library,—the door of which stood open as I passed, and the fireplace of which showed empty and black,—and up the wide stairs to the room Mr. Miles occupied.

He was sitting up in his old arm-chair by the fire which was the only cheerful thing I had seen in the house.

If I had thought the old man lonely when I was there before, much more he seemed so now: he was absolutely solitary. A row of

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books was on the table beside him, but their very number was an evidence that he had no appetite for them, and had them but to taste.

The only volume that looked as if he had been using it was an old Bible. It lay nearest him on his table, and had a marker in it.

He was only partly dressed, and had on an old, long, flowered dressing-gown and slippers, presenting a marked contrast to his general neatness of apparel, whilst a beard, which he had allowed to grow for a month or more, testified to his feebleness and added to the change in his appearance.

I never saw a picture of dejection greater than he presented as I entered. His head was sunk on his breast, and loneliness seemed to encircle him round almost palpably.

I think my visit cheered him a little, though he was strangely morose, and spoke of the world with unwonted bitterness. He was, however, manifestly pleased at my coming to see

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him, though he dwelt on the regret he felt at the trouble he caused me.

I tried to interest him in books and engage him in talking of them. But he declared that they were like people, they interested only when one was strong and vigorous, and deserted you when you were ill or unfortunate.

“They fail you at the crucial time, sir,” he said bitterly. “They forsake you or bore you.”

I said I hoped they were not so bad as that.

“Yes, sir, they are!” he asserted testily. “I esteemed them my friends; lived with them, cultivated them, and at the very moment when I needed them most they failed me!”

He reached over and took up the old Bible from his table.

“This book alone,” he said, “has held out. This has not deserted me. I have read something of all the philosophies, but none has the spirituality and power that I find in certain

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parts of this. No wonder Scott said, 'There is but one book.'

He laid the book down again, and I picked it up idly and opened it at the place where his paper was. A marked passage caught my eye.

"As one whom his mother comforteth."

I laid the book back from where I had taken it.

"That volume was my mother's," said the old man, softly. "She died with it on her pillow, as she had lived with it in her heart."

I persuaded him before I left to let me send a doctor to see him ; and coming away, I went by and saw Dr. Williams, one of the leading physicians in the town, who said he would go to him at once.

I called to see the doctor next day to ask about the old fellow, and he said he was a very ill man.

"He is going to die," said the doctor, calmly.

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“Well, Doctor, ought not he to have some one to stay with him?” I asked.

“Of course he ought,” said the doctor; “and I have told him so. But he is a very difficult man to deal with. What can you do with him? He is going to die anyhow, and knows it, and he says the idea of any one staying in the house with him makes him nervous. I have told his man William to stay in the house to-night, but I don’t know that he will let him do it.”

I went to see Mr. Miles that night, for I was very anxious about him, and found William much stirred up, and sincerely glad to see me. He had proposed to stay with him as the doctor had directed, but the old gentleman had positively forbidden it.

“He won’ have no-body roun’ him ’t all, suh,” said the old servant, hopelessly. “Two or three people been heah to see him to-day, but he won’ see none on ’em; he’ll hardly see

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me, an' he tell me when bedtime come, jes to shet up as ushal, an' let him 'lone.

“But I'm gwine to stay in dat house to-night, don' keer what he say!” said the old servant, positively.

I asked if he thought the old gentleman would see me. And we agreed that the best thing for me to do was to go right up and announce myself.

So I did it, and found him sitting up as before. He looked, if anything, feebler than he had done the evening before. He talked in a weaker voice, and was more drowsy. He said he could not lie down. I made up my mind to sit up with him that night if he did not actually drive me out of the house; so after a time, as he seemed sleepy, I settled myself comfortably in an arm-chair, which I emptied of a score of books.

I think my presence comforted him, for he said little, and simply drowsed on. Toward

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midnight he roused up, and having taken a stimulant which the doctor had left him, seemed stronger and rather inclined to talk.

The first question he asked surprised me. He said suddenly, "Is your mother living?"

I told him that she was.

"That is the greatest blessing a man can have," he said. "Mine died when I was ten years old, and I have never gotten over the loss. I have missed her every hour since. Had she lived, my life might have been different. It might not then have been the failure which it has been."

I was surprised to hear him speak so of himself, for I had always thought of him as one of the most self-contained of men, and I made some polite disavowal of his remark. He turned on me almost fiercely:

"Yes, sir, it has been a complete and utter failure!" He spoke bitterly. "I was a man of parts, and look at me now! A woman's influ-

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ence might have changed me.”

As he appeared inclined to talk, I prepared to listen. He seemed to find a grim pleasure in talking of himself and reviewing his life. His mother's death he continued to dwell on.

“She used to sit out on that seat under the beech tree,” he told me. “And I love that tree better than almost anything in the world. It is associated with almost every happy moment I have ever spent.

“Young man,” he said, sitting up in the energy of his speech, “marry—marry. I do not say marry for your own happiness,—though Heaven knows I am a proof of the truth of my words, dying here alone and almost friendless! —but marry for the good you may accomplish in the world and the happiness you may give others.”

Not to marry, he said, was the extreme of selfishness, for if a man does not marry, generally it is because he is figuring for something

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more than love. He then told me that his great fault was selfishness.

“I made one mistake, sir,” he said, “early in life, and it has lasted me ever since. I put Brains before everything, Intellect before Heart. It was all selfishness : that was the rock on which I split. I was a man of parts, sir, and I thought that with my intellect I could do everything. But I could not.”

I began to think of my own life.

“Young man, were you ever in love?” he asked.

Under the sudden question I stammered, and finally said, I did not know ; I believed I had been, but it was over now, anyhow.

“Young man,” he said, “treasure it—treasure it as your life. I was in love once—really in love only once—and I believed I had my happiness in my own hands, and I flung it away, and wrecked my life.”

He then proceeded to tell me the story of

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his love-affair, and how, instead of being content with the affection of the lovely and beautiful girl whose heart he had won, he had wanted to excel with every one, and to shine in all eyes.

“And I simply flung away salvation!” he said.

“I am not speaking groundlessly,” he asserted; “for I was not even left the poor consolation of doubt as to whether I should have succeeded. When at last I awoke from my besotted condition my chance was gone. The woman for whom I had given up the one I loved, because I thought she would advance me in life, proved as shallow and heartless as I was myself, and, after I had made my plans and prepared my house for her, threw me over remorselessly for what she deemed a better match, and married a rich fool; and when at length I went back to the woman I loved and offered her my heart, which, indeed, had al-

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ways been hers, she had given hers to another.

“Heaven knows I did not blame her, for though I had been fool enough to despise him, he was a thousand times worthier of her than I was, and made her a thousand times happier than I should have done with my selfishness.

“She told me that she had cared for me once, and might have married me had I spoken; but that time was long past, and she now loved another better than she had ever loved me.

“My pride was stung; but I fell back on my intellect, and determined again to marry brilliantly. I might have done so, perhaps, but I could not forget the woman I loved, and I was not quite base enough to offer again an empty heart to another woman, and so the time passed by.

“I had means enough to obviate the necessity of working for my support, and so did not work as I should have done had I been dependent on my profession, and men who had

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less than half my intellect outstripped me. At length, having no incentive to labor, I threw up my profession and travelled abroad. In time that failed me, and I returned to my beech tree only to find that I had dropped out of the current of life, and had exchanged the happiness of a home for the experiences of a wanderer.

“I had lost the universal touch in all the infinite little things which make up the sum of life, and even my friends, with few exceptions, were not just what they had been. If they were necessary to me, I was no longer necessary to them. They had other ties; had married, had children, and new interests formed in my absence. I found myself alone; everywhere a visitor; welcomed at some places—because I was agreeable when I chose to be—tolerated at others, but still only a visitor, an outsider, an alien.

“Then I fell back on my books. They lasted

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me for a while, and I read omnivorously; but only for amusement, and in time my appetite was satiated and my stomach turned. I had not the tastes of a scholar, nor even of a student, but only those of a dilettante. I was too social to enjoy long alone even books, and I did not read for use.

“So I turned to the world again, to find it even worse than it had been before. I was as completely alone as if I had been on a desert island, and it was too late for me to re-enter life.”

I do not mean to give this as a connected speech, for it was not: it was what he said at times through the long night, as he dwelt on the past and felt like talking.

Finally he broke in suddenly:

“Cultivate the affections, young man: cultivate the affections. Take an old man’s word for it, that the men who are happy are those who love and are loved. Better love the mean-

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est thing that lives than only yourself. Even as a matter of policy it is best. I had the best intellect of any young man of my time and set, and I have seen men with half my brains, under the inspiration of love and the obligations and duties it creates, go forward to success which I could never achieve. Whilst I was narrowing and drying up, they were broadening and reaching out in every direction. Often I have gone along the street and envied the poorest man I met with his children on their holiday strolls. My affections had been awakened, but too late in life ; and I could not win friendship then. That child that you had in your arms the day I met you was the first child I had seen in years who looked at me without either fear or repugnance.”

He sat back in a reverie.

The old man had, of course, mentioned no names ; but I had recalled the conversation of the two ladies that evening, and now under

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his earnestness I was drawn to admit that I had been in love, and feared I was yet.

He was deeply interested, and when I told him that he had already had his part in my affair, he was no less astonished.

Then I recalled to him the advice he had given me on the street corner on that May morning several years before. He remembered the incident of the carriage, with its burden of young girls, but he had had no idea I was the young man. He was evidently pleased at the coincidence.

“So you took my advice and picked a girl out of that very carriage, did you?” His wan face lit with the first smile I had seen on it since I had been with him.

“Whose carriage was it, and what was her name, if you do not mind telling an old man?” he asked. Then, as I hesitated a little, he said gently:

“Oh, no matter; don’t feel obliged to tell me.”

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“No,” I said; “I was only thinking. It was the ‘Hill-and-Dale’ carriage, and her name is ‘Elizabeth Dale.’”

“Elizabeth Dale?” he said, his eyes opening wide as they rested on my face; and then, as he turned to the fire and let them fall, he said to himself, “How strange!”

“Has she beauty?” he inquired, presently, after a reverie, in which he repeated to himself, softly, over and over, “Very strange.”

“I think she has,” I said, “and others think so, too. I believe you do yourself.”

“How is that? I have never seen her.”

“Yes, you have,” I said. “Do you remember your hat blowing off one day last spring on Richardson Street, and a young girl running out of a house, bareheaded, and catching it for you? Well, that was Elizabeth Dale.”

“Was it, indeed?” he said; and then added: “I ought to have known it, she looked so like her! Only I thought it was simply her beauty

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which made the resemblance. All youth and beauty coupled with sweetness have brought up Elizabeth Green to me through the years," he said gently.

"And the child who offered you the bread and jam that day was her nephew."

But he was now past further surprise, and simply said,

"Indeed!"

"Do you think she would come and see me?" he asked me presently, after a long reverie, in which he had been looking into the fire.

I said I was sure she would if she knew he wished it; and then I went off into a reverie, too.

"Cannot you bring her?" he asked.

"Why, I do not know— Yes, I suppose she would come with me,—only—only—. Why, yes, I could see if she would."

"Ask her to come and see an old man who

OF THE BLACK STOCK

has not long to stay here, and who wishes to see the girl whom you are going to marry.”

“But I am not going to marry her,” I said.

“We barely speak now.”

“Then the girl to whom you ‘barely speak now,’” he said, with something of a smile, and then added gravely: “the girl who picked up his hat for him,—an old man who knew her mother.”

I promised to do my best to get Miss Dale to come and see him, and then the old fellow dropped off into a doze, which soon became a sounder sleep than he had had at all.

XII

ELIZABETH DALE MAKES TEA FOR TWO LONE MEN

THE next day, after a long contention with myself, I called on Miss Dale to propose the visit which the Old Gentleman of the Black Stock had requested.

As I mounted the steps I felt as if I were charging a battery. But the servant said she had gone to drive with Mr. Goodrich. The woman gave me a look which I would have given much to interpret. Having screwed my courage, or whatever it was, up to the point of visiting Miss Dale at all, I found it stuck there; and even in the face of this last outrage to my feelings,—going to ride with the man about whom I had quarrelled with her,—I called on her again that afternoon, late enough to insure her return home and her presence in the house.

I will not undertake to describe my sensa-

OF THE BLACK STOCK
tions as I sat in the little darkened parlor, hat
in hand and overcoat still on, to indicate that
I had not called socially, but on business, and
business alone.

I awaited the return of the servant who announced me, in some doubt, if not apprehension, for I was not absolutely sure that Miss Dale would see me. So when the maid returned and said Miss Elizabeth would be down directly, and proceeded to light the gas in the parlor, I found my heart beating unpleasantly.

Then the servant disappeared, and left me in solitude.

I looked over the photographs and into the old books with which I was once so familiar, and listened to the movement going on upstairs. Then I sat down. But the glare was so oppressive that I rose and turned down the light a little.

Presently I heard some one—or something—coming down the stairs, a step at a time, and

THE OLD GENTLEMAN

when it reached the point where I could see it through the door, it proved to be Burton.

“I tummin’ to see you,” he said to me through the banisters, calling me by my name, for we had been famous friends that summer. “I dot on bitches!”

“Come on.” I felt cheered by the boy’s friendliness.

He came in and showed himself off, pointed out his pockets, stuck his hands in them, and strutted around, and rode “a cock-horse” with all a boy’s delight. I was just feeling something of my old easiness when he stopped suddenly, and striking an attitude, said :

“I dot a horse.”

“What! Who gave it to you?”

“Mist’ Oodrich.”

This was a blow.

“Mist’ Oodrich dave me dis too,” diving a hand into one of his pockets and tugging at something.

OF THE BLACK STOCK

But I did not learn what it was, for just then I heard another step coming slowly down the stair. The boy heard it, too, and with a shout ran out to meet his aunt.

Fortunately, I was sitting somewhat behind the door, so I was screened from observation and could not see what went on outside. But I could hear. The first thing was Burton's announcement that I was there in the parlor, giving me by my first name.

"Yes, aunty knows it," in an undertone.

Then I heard her say something to him in an even lower undertone, and he answered :

"No, no !"

After that I heard her low voice in a sort of subdued murmur, as she talked to him to try to persuade him to do something,—in a tone Circe might well have used to wile Ulysses,—and his replies :

"No, no, don't want to do up tairs." The little monster !

THE OLD GENTLEMAN

Then she grew more positive, and he started, with a little whimper as he went up.

I heard her say, "If you don't cry, I will let you ride my horse the first time I go to ride." This soothed him.

"Awe yite!" And he went on up as rapidly as one step at a time would take him.

There was a pause while she waited to see him pass up beyond the chance of return, and then I heard her begin to descend again.

As she approached the door I tried to appear natural, but I felt myself decidedly discomposed.

She came in with a great deal of dignity, and, I must say, ease of manner. I, however, was not to be put at my ease. I hardly waited for her to make her little apology for keeping me waiting. She had "just come in from a ride, and had to take off her hat."

It was not necessary to acquaint me with her having been to ride! I knew that quite as well as she!

OF THE BLACK STOCK

I, without delay, therefore, explained my call, and relieved her mind of any misapprehension she might be under as to the object of my visit. I was still stiff and ungracious enough, Heaven knows, and she was evidently a little surprised at my manner, for she became more formal herself. But I had made myself plain, and had set forth the old man's loneliness with some skill. I saw her eyes soften and her face grow tender.

And though she had stiffened a little, she said she would go as soon as she could put on her hat—if I would wait. If not, she would get her brother-in-law to take her after tea.

I said I would wait, and she left me.

I joined her in the little hall as she came down-stairs again, and ceremoniously opened the door for her and followed her into the street.

The only thing we talked of was the old gentleman she was going to see, and I was

THE OLD GENTLEMAN

aware that my voice sounded very unnatural. Hers seemed as soft as usual, but a little pensive.

I stole a glance at her now and then and thought that, as well as I could tell in the waning light, she was a little thinner than when I saw her last. This gave me a certain base satisfaction.

The trees on the street were leafless, and the air was chilly and a bit raw as the dusk of the winter evening fell. The tree tops looked like an etching against the steely sky.

I led the way to the next street, and let her in at the old gate where I had first met Mr. Basham Miles several years before, and which I had helped her over that summer evening when we read her mother's initials on the beech tree.

We went up the long, uneven walk, through the old yard towards the now dark house, and I remember the mournful way the white, dry

OF THE BLACK STOCK

leaves on the lower boughs of the old beech rustled in the chilly wind.

William Kemp opened the door after my second knock, and looked with unfeigned surprise at my companion. He said the old gentleman was much the same, and he would find out whether he could see us.

I determined to take no chances ; so, whilst William lit the gas in the dark, cold library, I “tipped” up-stairs and went to the old gentleman’s door.

I found him glad to see me, and as ready as he could be to receive his visitor. So, without giving him time to think much about it, I acted on his half consent, and a moment later showed Elizabeth Dale into his room.

She paused for a moment at the threshold and then advanced, and as the old gentleman tried to rise to greet her, quickened her step, giving a little exclamation of protest against his getting up.

THE OLD GENTLEMAN

I have never forgotten the picture they presented. She sat by his side, and he held her hand, so white and slender and fine, his wrinkled long fingers clasped tremulously around hers, as he begged her pardon for the trouble he had given her, and thanked her for the favor she had granted him.

He had more strength than I had seen him show.

The fine, old-fashioned courtliness of the one and the sweet graciousness of the other were counterparts, whilst the grayness and feebleness of the invalid and the roses and health of the young girl set each other off in strong contrast.

They might have sat for Immortal Age and Immortal Youth.

In a little while she was holding the old man's hand, not he *hers*, and as he mentioned my name in terms of kindness, I drew somewhat apart and left them together, he doing

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Howard Chandler Christy, 1917



OF THE BLACK STOCK

most of the talking, and she listening and stroking his hand as if she had been his daughter.

Presently—he had been talking of his youth in that house, and of the appearance that part of the town used to present when the hill was crowned with houses embowered in trees—he said :

“My dear, did you ever hear your mother speak of me?” His voice was so gentle that I scarcely caught it.

I could see her embarrassment. She said, very slowly, after trying to recollect :

“I—cannot remember that I ever did.”

And then, as if distressed that she might have given him pain, she said kindly, leaning forward and stroking his hand softly :

“She may have done it, you know, without my recollecting it, for I was a heedless young thing.”

How sweet her voice sounded, and what

THE OLD GENTLEMAN
sorrow was in her eyes,—sorrow that she must
have given that old man sorrow, though she
sacrificed all to Truth!

He did not speak immediately; but presently he said gravely:

“I am not surprised.” And then he added quietly:

“My dear, I used to be in love with your mother, and I never loved any one else. I was most unworthy of her. But I have carried her image in my heart all these years.”

Without a word the young girl rose and leant over and kissed him.

Just then William opened the door and brought in a waiter with tea-things for his master's tea. It was not very inviting, though it was the best the faithful William and his wife could do.

Without a word of apology the young girl stepped forward and took the tray, and then, with no more explanation than if she had done

OF THE BLACK STOCK

it every evening of her life for him, she set to work to prepare the old man's tea.

It was marvellous to see what a woman's hands could do. Her touch was as deft as an enchantress' wand. Out of the somewhat crowded and unappetizing waiter came an order and daintiness which were miraculous. And when she handed Mr. Miles his tea in the old blue china cup I knew that he could not help taking it.

The same instinct seemed to teach her what was needed in the room. She flitted hither and thither, a touch here, a touch there—and when she arose to leave a half-hour later, the room was transformed; she left behind her comfort and something like order where before there had been only confusion. She left more than that—she left an old man cheered and comforted as he had not been in years.

As she rose to go she said:

“I want you now to grant me a favor—I

THE OLD GENTLEMAN

want you to let me come again?—To-morrow?
—Will you?”

No one could have resisted that appeal, least of all, Basham Miles; for she was leaning over him, arranging a pillow for him as he had never had one arranged before in all his life.

He could not answer her question; he merely took her hand in both his, and raising it to his lips, said tremulously:

“God bless you!”

The young girl bent over and kissed him good-night—kissed him twice, as she might have kissed her father.

He said again, “God bless you!” and again, when she was at the door, he repeated, “God bless you!”

We came down the stairs without a word, and William let us out of the door.

We were down on the walk when I remembered that I had not told him that I would return later, and I went back to the door.

OF THE BLACK STOCK

When I came down the steps again my companion was standing a little way down the walk waiting for me, and I found she had her hand to her eyes. I said—I do not remember just what I said, but she turned a little way off the walk, and sat down on a seat under the nearest tree. It was the old Beech tree which Basham Miles treasured so.

“That poor old man!” she sobbed, and fell to weeping as if her heart would break.

I never could see either a man or a woman weep and remain unmoved. I dropped down by her, hardly knowing what I was doing, except that Elizabeth Dale was there weeping and needed comforting, and I was at her side. And before I knew it, I had forgotten my pride, my jealousy, everything, and had told her all that was in my heart. It was much. But it was all in one word. I loved her.

She did not stop crying immediately, and she did not say a word. But before I was

THE OLD GENTLEMAN
through she was sobbing on my shoulder, and she did not take her hand away from me. And when I came out of Basham Miles's broken gate I did not hate Hamilton Goodrich any more. In fact, I was rather sorry for him; for I had learned that he had received his final, though by no means his first, refusal that afternoon.

I do not remember just how we got home, but I suppose we walked. I only know that it was through a new town and a new life.

We were too late for tea, but I went in, and Elizabeth Dale made tea for the second time that evening, though it was her first time for me.

The other members of the family were all out of the way, and as I sat opposite Elizabeth at the shining old mahogany table, with its odd pieces of old silver, which I knew must be bits of salvage from Hill-and-Dale, I felt as a sea-beaten mariner might feel who has



— Howard Chandler Christy, 1890 —



O F T H E B L A C K S T O C K

reached home after long voyaging. I had been tossed on many seas, but had reached haven at last.

The Old Gentleman of the Black Stock had proved a good pilot.

XIII

BASHAM MILES'S WILL

WHEN I went back to Mr. Miles's, which I did not do, I believe, until Elizabeth Dale sent me off, William told me that he had gone to bed and was asleep, and had told him he might stay in his room that night, and I must not come until next day.

This I acceded to, and the next evening I took Elizabeth Dale to make tea for him again. He seemed really better: his eye had a new light in it, and his voice a new tone.

Elizabeth Dale went to see him every day after that, twice a day, and sat with him, took him flowers, and made tea for him. Other friends came too, and he saw them and enjoyed them.

One afternoon Elizabeth took her little nephew to see him, and he enjoyed the child and took him on his knee and played with

O F T H E B L A C K S T O C K

him. In fact, the old gentleman appeared so much better that we were all talking about his being out again—all except himself. Therefore, I was much shocked one morning when William Kemp knocked at my door and told me he was dead. He had retired that night, “about as usual,” and when William went to him in the morning he found him dead in his bed.

“He’s layin’ dyah, jes same’s he ’sleep,” said the old servant, mournfully.

“He tol’ me when he die he want me to send for you to come—an’ dat’s de reason I come.”

I went around immediately and found several neighbors there already, for he had more friends than he had known of.

By common consent it appeared that I was the person to take charge of arrangements. William had told them what his old master had said.

THE OLD GENTLEMAN

“An’ dere ’s a letter for you, suh,” he said to me. “Somewhar in he ole secketary. He writ it not long ago, an’ he tole me he had put it in dyah for you, and I wuz to tell you ’bout it when he died. He said dat would tell all ’bout de ’rangements for de funeral an’ ev’thing. He knowed he wuz gwine, suh, better ’n we all.”

Thus notified, some time during the day, after I had telegraphed to his relatives, none of whom were very near or bore his name, I looked for and found the letter.

It was a large envelope, addressed to me and sealed with his crest, and on opening it I found a letter in it couched in most affectionate terms, and giving explicit directions as to his funeral, which he said he did to save me and others trouble.

He requested that he might be buried in the simplest manner and with the least expense possible, and that his grave should be beside his mother’s.

OF THE BLACK STOCK

There was one singular request : that a carriage should be provided especially for William Kemp and his wife, and that William should be one of the men to lower him into the grave.

There was in the envelope another envelope, also sealed and addressed to me, and on the back was endorsed:

“Holograph Will of Basham Miles.

To be opened only after his funeral.”

The relatives (there were only one or two of them to come) arrived next day. And that afternoon, as the winter sun sank below the horizon, the little funeral procession crept out to the old and now almost disused cemetery looking towards the west, and in the soft after-glow of the evening the remains of Basham Miles were laid to rest beside those of his mother, over which rose a beautiful white marble monument with a touching inscription, which I knew was written by him.

THE OLD GENTLEMAN

There were not a great many people in the church, and they were nearly all old people, in black. Among them I observed my two old ladies who had told me of Basham Miles when he was young. They came together in their old, black dresses, the younger helping her three months senior quietly and pensively along.

The relatives, of course, walked first. But of all there, I was sure that there was no sincerer mourner than the young girl who came last. With her dark veil drawn close about her little head she sat far back in the church alone. But I knew that it was that she might weep unobserved.

The will was opened in the presence of witnesses that night, as the relatives had to return home. It was all in Basham Miles's handwriting, and covered only a single sheet. It left a certain sum to his "faithful servants, William Kemp and Jane, his wife, to buy them

OF THE BLACK STOCK

a house and lot of their own"; bequeathed small amounts to two or three distant relatives; left me his library; left his watch to "Burton Dale Davis."

And then gave, "The old Bible, once my sainted mother's, together with all the rest of my property, of every kind whatsoever, to Elizabeth Dale, youngest daughter of Elizabeth Dale, formerly Elizabeth Green, now deceased."

I was appointed executor.

The sole condition he proposed to Elizabeth Dale was that she should try to have the old beech tree in his yard spared as long as was practicable. Even this, however, was particularly stated to be but a request.

But I feel sure that the Old Gentleman of the Black Stock knew it would be as binding on my wife as if it had been in the form of an express condition, and that so long as Elizabeth Dale should live, the old beech tree,

T H E O L D G E N T L E M A N
under which Basham Miles remembered his
mother sitting, in his childhood, and on which
he had carved her mother's name in his youth,
would stand in proof that Basham Miles was
not forgotten.

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