

THE OLD GENTLEMAN
OF THE BLACK STOCK



THOMAS NELSON PAGE



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OLD GENTLEMAN
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BLACK STOCK

BY
THOMAS NELSON PAGE

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1897

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TROW DIRECTORY
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NEW YORK

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THE OLD GENTLEMAN OF THE BLACK STOCK

I

HE was one of my first acquaintances when I came up to town to live; for though I did not learn his name for some time afterward, I met him almost immediately after I gave up my country identity and melted into the sea of the city, and thenceforth I always knew him, though, as I found many others did, only as "the old gentleman of the black stock."

Why I spoke to him that summer morning I can readily understand; but why he spoke to me I did not know until long afterward. I was lonely and homesick. I had

not met any one except my cousin, who had given me a place in his law office and was most kind to me, but who 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. All of these last, too, were older than I, and seemed so very much older. At twenty-one a few years make a great difference. And 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 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 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 in their big yards, I had forgotten my dreams of the future, which had heretofore gilded my little room and peopled my quiet office, and was back in the past among the overgrown fence-rows and fields of my country home. It was then that I met the old gentleman of the black stock for the first time, 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; had, indeed, not yet gotten over the strange feeling at not speaking to every one I met, in accordance with the country custom which made passing any one on the road without a bow a breach of manners.

I was strolling along an old street that morning, looking at the old yards full of trees and shrubbery in a tangled and some-

what neglected state, which reminded me of the yard at home, and had only half taken in the fact that out of the largest and most tangled of them, 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 was looking back at the trees behind him. I insensibly followed his eye, and looked up at the trees myself as I walked slowly along. There were three or four big locusts, two elms, and one beech, all large and very old. The beech had a seat under it, and it was at this that the old gentleman's gaze seemed to be particularly directed. They, 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 and looked away. I glanced at him again, for there was something about him which was unusual, quite as unusual as that square of old houses and yards in a growing city, and he attracted me. He seemed just to fit in with them, and to be separate from the rest of the people I had seen : almost as separate as I was. So when I looked at him again I tried to do it as if quite casually, and to take in as much of him as I could in my glance. 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 broad-cloth frock-coat, somewhat more flowing than usual, however, 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 years. This was all that I took in of his dress ; for I caught his eye again as my glance reached his thin and somewhat care-worn face, clean-shaven except for a white mustache. His eyes were gray, and were set back very far under somewhat heavy brows, and I looked into them involuntarily. He did not give me time to look away again ; but spoke to me easily, pleasantly, 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 had paused to avoid 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.

“How long have you been from the country ?” he asked.

I was a little taken aback ; for, apart from the fact that his abrupt question implied that he knew I was not a city man, I was sufficiently conscious of a certain difference between myself and the 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 explain himself differently, I simply said :

“ 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 said, and scanned me so boldly and, I fancied, rudely that I said, quite shortly :

“ Good-morning, sir. ”

It was only when I went over in my mind afterward 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 part-

ing salute, and decided that he could not have meant to insult or wound me.

I asked my cousin who he was, and attempted to describe him; but though I went into some detail and, I know, gave 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.

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 at first had in my little hall room. And as I fell into city ways I began to visit 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 exchange his passing and pleasant salutation.

II

Two years or so after the summer morning when I met him coming out of the shady yard on that old street (it was, I remember, in the month of May), I was passing down a business 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 most. For whilst the others were city equipages with showy teams, and fashionable women lolling back in the easy, or pretendedly easy, style of

ladies of fashion when they honor the trading section at the change of the seasons, and who, if they knew me, condescended to acknowledge my bow with cold superciliousness, this vehicle 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 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-sprung and "shackling ;" as muddy as a country wagon, and drawn by two ill-matched though not ill-bred horses, spattered with mud to their ears, their long tails tied up in

knots, and was driven by an old darky with a low beaver hat and a high white collar. It reminded me of the old carriage, with its old driver, Uncle Balla, at home. But what struck me more than anything else as it passed me was that it was filled 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 a sweet-faced lady, with gray hair and a patrician profile, smiled softly and happily among them, well content with their gayety and joy. They caught my eye, for I never saw more

roses in one carriage, and I had stopped and was staring at them open-mouthed, with a warm glow 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 the country girls I knew whom these were like. One of them particularly struck me, and I thought I had caught her gaze on me, when a hand was laid 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. I smiled 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, 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 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 a little disappointment.

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

"I have rarely seen a more striking-looking man," said he, as he went on.

I do not know just why 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. I went up square after square looking for it among the shining equipages with their pompous coachmen and sleek horses, 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 even went as far as to enter three or four of the larger and more frequented stores on the street in the hope 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. 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 women standing on the other side of the counters, and had just given up my search in despair and was returning to my office, when I passed a milliner's window. I happened to glance in, and there were my rosebuds clustered together in front of a large mirror, my especial 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 sisters or from the glass only, I do not know; for at the same moment that she turned to her sister, 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 over-sheltering hat with its roses could not shadow it, but seemed only a bower for the lovelier roses beneath. I had become so engrossed with the pretty tableau that I had forgotten I might be seen from within quite plainly, and stood staring open-eyed at my young beauty through the window, so that when I became aware she was looking through the glass, past her sister, and straight into my eyes, I gave quite a jump at my rudeness. The look of embarrassment, almost bordering on horror, which was on her face was all that I saw, and I almost fled toward my office. I learned afterward that had I waited I should have seen her confusion give way to uncontrollable amusement over my flight. 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, waited to watch from a more secure quarter further developments at the milliner's. I had not long to wait, for shortly from the door sallied the three young nymphs, each under a new and wide straw hat ; but only one now filled my eye—the wide-brimmed creation which served as setting for the flower-garden above the yet more charming flower-garden below, which 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, at something (I learned afterward at my sudden jump and unexpected flight), and turned in at a dry-goods store : one which I had already

threaded that morning in my search for my unknown lady. If there was any common though unwritten law against a man's going into a millinery store, there was, thank Heaven, none against his going into a dry-goods store; at least, if he could devise some want which he could get supplied there. I had the want, beyond doubt; but a sweetheart, if she were wholly unknown, as happened to be the case with me, would palpably not do; I could not ask for her. So I cudgelled my brains for something that I might ask for if I were halted within. I finally lit on neckties. Neckties give time in the examination and selection, and have a sort of half-way place between a woman's wear and a man's. So, having made this resolution, I ventured in, and found the same rows of backs, augmented somewhat by new additions, bending over piles of

every conceivable stuff, and the same assiduous clerks and tired women on the other side of the counters. As I passed on I heard many criticisms and some complaints—some harsh, some only petulant—from the women with backs, received for the most part in silence by the women without backs. Suddenly I started 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 the moment bending over a piece or pieces of some lawny white stuff. Her gloves were off, and the slender little hands were feeling the texture with a touch as soft as if it had been cobweb. 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 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, as she turned away to her shelves, pleased at the tone of sympathy. And who would not think 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 the old driver 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 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?” I said.

“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 gave another look.

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

“Yes, suh; I never see sich folks in my life. 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 people in the State, and "Hill-and-Dale" was as well known as the capital city: one of the old 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' Mill, and had left a widow and a family of young daughters, whose reputation for beauty had reached me even before I left my old country home, though I had never seen any of them, as their home was in another county, quite seventy miles from us.

“Well, they are in that store now,” I said, to put his mind at rest. “At least, one of them is.”

“Is dee?” he asked. 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; “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 of the door, looking alternately up and down, evidently expecting someone who had promised to come and had not. My

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

“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 was like sunlight breaking out on an already sweet and lovely prospect.

“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 a few rods farther on, however,

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 graceful motion and tripped 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 a few minutes after three, but though "them two rocks" were there and "the red store," and many other carriages came and went, the old coach from

Hill-and-Dale came not, and neither did its pretty little rose-and-sunshine mistress. The street seemed quite deserted.

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

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 vividness for quite a period—for several weeks at least, I should say—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 that there were other eyes besides hers, and other girls wore roses in their hats and roses under them too. So that though at first I formed all sorts of plans, romantic and otherwise, to meet her, and even carried one so far into execution as to purchase a handsomely bound set of Ten-

nyson to send her anonymously, and mark one or two passages which described her aptly, and should force her curiosity to penetrate my almost invulnerable anonymity, yet courage failed me in face of the practical 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 books, 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 of this, and I applied myself somewhat more faithfully to what I called "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 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 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 of her. Once when I read in a paper a notice of 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 I was sensible of a feeling of relief. She 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 beauty of the sisters, all of whom had acted as bridesmaids, and 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 suppose. The notice evidently was written by a friend. It went on to say that there was a report that "another sister" would soon follow the example of the eldest. My heart had another sink at this, and I could have cursed the writer for not giving some intimation as to which sister it was.

Another occasion when I was reminded of her 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 them occasionally in the interim.

During the two or three years which had

passed I had formed many new acquaintances in the city, and made some friends.

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 window of 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 occupant 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. Miles, Mr. Basham Miles, one of the old residents of the city, and owner of the old 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 eccentric and very proud. He lived alone when in the city, and took 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 deal of his time, both winter and summer, either visiting old friends in the country, summering at some of the smaller and 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 head of the local bar. Old

lawyers still told stories of the cleverness and skill of Miles and Thompson. But he had suddenly given up practice, abandoned the bar, gone abroad, and "dropped out." No one of my informants knew anything further, if they knew that; for it was only by piecing together bits of recollection 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 reaching 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 one woman ; some said two ; some hinted at even a half-dozen. Some said it was a scandal ; some said that it was a slander ; some only that he was crossed in love, and gave up, soured and disheartened. The more numerous part asserted the first. Men are always ready to believe scandal of a man.

I was interested enough to investigate farther, for somehow the idea of associating the base and horrid life of a *débauché* with my clean 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 at that moment engrossed my meditation (for I am speaking of the days immediately succeeding the incident of the rose-filled carriage), I applied myself to the further and more careful investigation of these compromising echoes of old 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.

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 about 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?" etc.

"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 were ever at the bar. He left the bar because—[hunting through the book]—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 some-

thing, and he never got over it. Ah, here it is!—[reading]—‘Calthorp’s Ex’or 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, 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, satisfied. I had established the fact, which I had already believed, that if my old gentleman had “dropped out,” it was his own choice.

IV

NOT long after that 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 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 came. He evidently did not know I was the one to whom he had given the advice about stopping a 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 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. 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 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 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 than from 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. His house itself was a curiosity: one of the old double houses,

built on a simple and dignified plan, almost square, with that adherence to the old, simple, classic models adapted for room, sunshine, and air, which we now call "colonial," 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 he himself was from the other men on the street. A handsome portico with Doric columns dignified its front. The door, with a large fan-shaped transom above it and a lock strong enough to have secured the Bastille, was itself a feature, and admitted you to the ample hall, which ran entirely through the house to the back door and a long back portico beyond it. A stairway sufficiently wide to suggest ampleness in the rooms above led on 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 a minute or more somewhere outside behind the house, but it was garnished with a large and handsome 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.

When I entered, which I did not do until I had both rung and knocked several times and a negro woman had come around the side of the house and after looking at me had asked whom I wanted to see, I found things much the same way within that they were without. The hall was hung with paintings, some of which seemed to me fine, but they were dim and blistered, and the frames were all dingy and old. The room I was shown into was furnished

with old furniture and filled with handsome things ; but everything appeared to me to be placed without the least regard to either fitness or comfort. The chairs were all ranged back stiffly against the wall, and vases and other bric-à-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 evidently a living-room, and the fine old books redeemed everything. Yet even there were signs of the 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 admitted to the house, seemed to divine where things

were in that room at least, and made my visit so agreeable that instead of spending one half-hour with him I spent several. He possessed a knowledge of books which appeared to me rare, and possessed what was more, 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 quote themselves. They were not books but the men who wrote them. 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 who were sincere.

“When you find a sincere man in a book, sir,” he said, “he is like a sincere man in life. You know him at once, and he is *rara avis*. The old ones were sincere. Shake-

speare, 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 sincere, and that was his value; you could always count on him; "a clear and 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. 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 was sincere because he was a

poet ; and Wordsworth was. They had a high idea of their profession—as a lawyer, for instance ; he may not have a large or lucrative practice, and yet may be an ornament to the bar because of the high plane on which he practises.”

I asked him about Carlyle and Emerson. He admitted the sincerity of both ; but Carlyle he did not like because he was ill-tempered and sour, and was always sneering at others. “Jeremiah, without his inspiration or his occasion,” he said of him. “He is not a gentleman, sir, and has never forgiven either the world or himself for it.” Emerson he put on a much higher plane ; but though he admitted his sincerity, and ranked him the first American literary man, he said he did not read him. “He preaches too much for me,” he said, “and he is all texts. When I want preaching I go to church.”

He liked his poetry better than his prose, though he declared it was hardly verse.

“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. It is always the same. Montaigne drew from him, 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 sense and the courage to be truthful. Montaigne was not so great as Plutarch because he was less spiritual. But he knew the human heart. Why, sir,” he added, with unwonted enthusiasm, “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 know

absolutely 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. 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 remarkable, or even 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 ; 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 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 thing

when he spoke of old times and things. His talk of old days was delightful, but was mainly 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 been under the shadow of disappointment.

I left him with something of sadness, passing out of the cheerless hall and through the old weather-blistered door, and I was not 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 met him occasionally after that, and always with a feeling of mingled regard and sympathy. I could hardly tell why ; 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 did. 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 to me: the recipient of the volume 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 afterward bestowing on him not only herself, but my Tennyson as well, side-marked passages and all; and I had not even the poor consolation of thinking that he would see them and be jealous, for I do not believe he ever opened the book, or, for that matter, any book in his life. 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 and the 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

DURING these years I had come to know many old 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. There is a certain something about them quite indescribable. 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, when all tints have vanished and all lines have subsided, with age which is con-

tent 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 easily 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 ;

they all live in the past, and talk of your grandmother as if she were your sister, 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 one do anything except flop around on its side like a headless chicken, before a party of

young ruffians, every one of whom could "plug" a top with mathematical 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 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 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 it 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 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 marbles than to play monarch.” And he went on his way rather slowly.

VI

BUT this was the way I came to hear of his history. I happened to hear one evening a conversation between two old ladies which threw some light on the old fellow's past. I was calling on one of them, 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 the other old lady happened to come to see her whilst I was there. Her visit, as I recollect it, was to tell her friend of some old crony of theirs from whom she had lately had a letter, and who had sent her a message in it. She had brought the letter with her, and they read it, and talked about the writer, who they both agreed must be older than either of them by several years.

And then they drifted back to their girlhood, when they were all three together at the Springs one summer. It was forty odd years before ; yet 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 gave them, and the dresses they wore at the ball, as if it had all 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 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 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.

I wondered what she was thinking of in that forty odd years where lay 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 awoke from her reverie it was with a smile.

Her friend, too, had been back in the past.

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

“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 wonder 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 did. I wouldn’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 Basham Miles as an Adonis, or as a careless and arrogant heart-

breaker, and I followed the idea off into reverie and vacancy, and was recalled only by the mention of the name "Hill-and-Dale." The old lady who had worn the lilac mull, and who was much the haler of the two, was speaking, 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. 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.”

“Elizabeth? Yes, she is like Betsey. But not so pretty,” said the other old lady, rising to leave.

“I thought she was rather prettier; but then I see so badly these days. Good-by; 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 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-by.” 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 saw the visitor down the steps, and would have seen her home if she would have let me; but she positively declined this attention, declaring smilingly that I would think her "as old and helpless as Malviny Gray."

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.

I did not meet him or see him again on the street for some little time. But one day, as I turned into a new street, 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, ran down from one of the little new tidy houses on the opposite side, tripped out into the street and caught the truant hat 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, and, as he thanked her warmly, as I could see even at a distance, 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 day so long ago. I had recognized Basham Miles at a distance as his hat blew off, but I did not recognize the young lady who had rendered him the service ; indeed, I did not see her face ; but I was sure 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 graceful stranger was and looking at her windows that I forgot my intention to overtake old Mr. Miles, who might have told me, and he turned the corner of the street before I could catch up with 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, though, 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 was that I did not find out who the new-comer was.

As it turned out, I discovered later that he did not know her. The next time I met him he asked me to find out who she was, and let him know. I suggested that I might find some difficulty in doing so.

“Difficulty?” he said. “Why, sir, when I was your age I knew every pretty girl in town.”

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

“Pretty! She was a beauty, sir. She looked like an angel. 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 he sighed and turned away.

VII

ONLY a day or two after this conversation—I am not sure that it was not the next day—I happened to be on a little street in the same direction with, but several blocks farther out than 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 were there were of the poorest class. As I passed along I 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 and look to see what amused them. I found it to be a very small and exceedingly dirty lit-

tle boy, who certainly presented an amusing enough spectacle. He was so little that it was wonderful how so much dirt could have gotten 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, no doubt he had been doing; his hands were caked with mud, and his face also was plentifully streaked with it. Where it showed through, the skin looked fair and the face refined. He did not seem at all disturbed or 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 our understanding him: he was so small that he could not talk plainly.

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

“Urt’n Ale Avith.”

“What?”

“Urt’n Ale Avith.” In a different key.

“What? Urt’n Ale Avith?”

“Nor. Urt’n Ale Avith.” With some impatience.

They changed the question.

“Where do you live?”

“At ’ome.”

“Where is that?”

“At ’ome.” Evidently struck by their denseness.

“What street?” asked someone.

“Witchen Cheet.”

“Witchin Street?”

“Nor; Witchen Cheet.”

“Where is that?” the crowd asked of each other. No one knew.

“What did you leave home for, honey?” asked a woman, stooping over him.

“Wunned away,” he answered promptly, with a reawakening of interest.

“Runned away?”

“Mh—hmh,” with a nod of satisfaction.

“What did you run away for?”

“I d'n' know.”

At this a child who had worked its way into the inner circle about him gave a shrill explosion of laughter. The little fellow's face flushed suddenly, and he walked up, and doubling his little 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 and 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,” said several women, pressing around him, and one of them asked him: “Don’t you want somethin’ to eat? Ain’t you hungry?”

“Mh—hmh—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.” And several of the women with motherly kindness began to talk as to which could give him something quickest.

“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 of 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 full of bread—and having taken leave of his friends, we started out to find his home.

We had not gone more than fifty steps when 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 to find myself carrying such a bundle of boy and mud anyhow, 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 ridiculousness of the figure I must cut.

I would gladly have put my little burden down, but he would not be so disposed of. Under prosperity he 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 still was walking rather more vigorously than when I last saw him before. 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 impressed by his pale thin face, suddenly held out his chubby hand with a piece of jam-smeared bread in it, and said, "Warn tome?" It manifestly pleased the old fellow, for he actually bent over and made a pretence of biting a piece.

When I left him I took a side street.

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, which I had chosen to avoid observation from people I knew on my own

street, I heard a voice behind me exclaim :

“ Why, Burton, where on earth have you been ? ”

Turning, I stood face to face with Elizabeth Dale.

She was too much engrossed with the child, whom I discovered immediately to be her nephew, to notice me at first, and I found myself abandoned by my charge, who immediately deserted me, leaving, however, abundant mementos 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, for, in fact, I should have liked to be as small as he to have enjoyed the same privilege. 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 made it trim, and had given thoughtfulness to her rosy face and made it gracious as well as sweet. As she turned half away from me, with the boy in her arms, I recognized her on the instant as the 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 evidenced both in the affection with which the child choked and kissed her, and the sweetness with which she received his embraces, muddy and jam-smear'd as he was. All she said was: "Oh, Burton, isn't that enough? You'll ruin aunty's best dress." But Burton only choked her the harder.

I offered to take him and relieve her, but she declined, and he would not have come

even if she would have let him. 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 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 caten of the husks of the swine, he had, at least,

looked as if he had played with them. She even said her sister had written me her thanks, but 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 sister happened to have a headache, 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.

VIII

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 beach-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 told me he had left town for the summer. I did not think of him again for a long time.

I remember that summer very well, for I was not the only person that stayed in town.

Miss Elizabeth Dale was also there, and though she went off once, to my great discontent, 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 I was in love with her, and certainly, at least, I never thought of its being a practical matter. I never dreamed of the possibility of her being in love with me. She was far too beautiful and too popular to ever think of a poor young lawyer like myself. In fact, marriage was something on which I might dream, but I never seriously contemplated it. I thought I should marry some day as I thought I should die some day, but I cer-

tainly never thought 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 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 a minute. As far as I went was to timorously send her flowers, or worship her beauty and hate furiously every man who had the impertinence to look at her. If I used to see her almost every evening, stroll with her on the shady streets, read to her, think of her and plan for her a great deal more than I did of my practice, which had really grown some, as was quite fortunate for the little florist at the corner above me, though it was still far below the large and lucrative practice which was to be my stepping-stone to the chief-justiceship—it was only as a beautiful being whose mere

smile was more than all other rewards, and all that I dared aspire to. I was not then 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 afternoon that Elizabeth Dale and I were strolling through the old street on which his house stood. As we passed slowly along, exchanging the pleasant momentous 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 an air of placid 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 that spring. The gate was tied up, and I was about to cut the fastening when she said she would climb over it, which she did with my aid, and with the agility which characterized her every movement. We wandered about for awhile, 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. Most of the carving was old, for few entered that secluded yard of late, and much was indecipherable. One pair of initials high up enclosed in a heart I made out as "B. M." and "E. G.," but my companion did not entirely agree with me. The "B. M." she thought probably correct, but the "E. G." only possibly so. "Those letters would stand for my mother," she said, softly, "only she was always Betsey."

"Or, '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."

"Why, it would be like sacrilege," she said. "Whoever they were, they were, no doubt, two lovers, and that old scar may be the only trace left of them on earth."

I don't know whether it was that our conversation began to grow a little too grave after that; but she suddenly decided that we had 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, and the only time I remember that we ever spoke of old Mr. Miles.

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, a certain Mr. Goodrich, who lived in another State and a larger city. I had met him once in the early summer, and had thought nothing of him: not as much as I did of several others who used to sit on Mrs. Davis's front porch 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 said—at Mrs. Davis's. I met him there 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, and was reported to be exceedingly rich; nor even by the further fact that Miss Dale was going somewhere to teach that year, her scholastic term beginning a month or two later than usual, on account of the absence in Europe of the lady who had engaged her. I gave myself so many airs about Mr. Goodrich's "continuous business" (for such was the cause assigned for his protracted stay among us), and made myself so generally disagreeable—a faculty which I possess extensively—that finally Miss Dale 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 some

speech of mine to the effect that it was not only the poor, but the rich that we had always with us, with some other observation of like tenor bearing on Mr. Goodrich's name, which Miss Dale considered offensive ; and though I freely confess 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 was so inexorable in her indignation that I found not the slightest ground for hope that she would relent and accept my apologies. I was accordingly forced to assume the " high horse " as my sole refuge ; which I did with what outward grace I might, though I was inwardly consumed between consternation, regret, and rage.

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.

IX

IN my time of tribulation I began to think of many persons and things which I had rather forgotten in the times of my prosperity, and among them was old Mr. Basham Miles. I had not seen him on the street the whole fall, as I generally did at that season of the year, and one day I asked William about it. 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, no-how, strange folks expressly; he wouldn’ even have a doctor to come to see him, after old Doctor Thomas die. He used to come sometimes. Since den he wouldn’ have no-body; but me and Jane got him to le’ me go and ax Doctor Williams to come an’ see him, an’ he say he pretty sick, an’ gi’ him some physic, but he wouldn’ 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 ’twuz 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 an’ annur lady too, sen’ him things; but he won’ see no-body, an’ he won’ eat nuttin. I’s right smartly troubled ’bout him, suh.”

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

“I tell you, suh,” he 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 alone. A row of books was on the table beside him, but their very number was an evidence that he had no appetite for them, and only had them to taste. The only one 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 half 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 greater picture of dejection 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 manifestly pleased, however, at my coming to see 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 unfortu-

nate. "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 said, 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 parts of this." 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.”

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, who said he would go at once.

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

“He is going to die,” said the doctor, calmly.

“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 anyone 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 nobody roun' him 'tall, suh," he said, hopelessly. "Two or three people been heah to see him to-day, but he won' see none on 'em ; he'll hardly see 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 he 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 fixed 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 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 her 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 him 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 said, bitterly. "I was a man of parts, and look at me now. A woman's influence might have changed me."

As he appeared inclined to talk, I pre-

pared 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 he loved the tree better than almost anything in the world. It was associated, he said, with almost every happy moment he had 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 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.

"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 anyhow.

"Young man," he said, "treasure it—treasure it as your life. I was in love once—once only really in love—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 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 said, "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 esteemed 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 always 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 loved me once, and would 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 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.

“Then I fell back on my books. They lasted me for awhile, and I read omnivorously; but only for my amusement, and in time my appetite was satiated and my stomach turned. I had not the tastes of a scholar, or 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 an island, and it was too late for me to re-enter life.”

I do not mean to give this as his 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. They alone give true happiness. Take an old man’s word for it, that the men who are happy are those who love and are loved. Better love the meanest 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 indifference.”

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 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 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?” he said, with the first smile I had seen on his wan face since I had been with him. “Whose carriage was it, and what was her name, if you don’t 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.”

“No,” I said ; “I was only thinking. It was the Hill-and-Dale carriage, and her name was 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 asked me 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 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 has not long to stay here, and who wishes to see the girl whom you are going to marry,” he said.

“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.

X

THE next day, after a long contention with myself, I called on Miss Dale to propose the visit which Mr. Miles had requested. But the servant said she had gone to drive with Mr. Goodrich.

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, in 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 presence in the house.

I will not undertake to describe my sensations as I sat in the little darkened parlor, hat in hand and overcoat 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 she 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 when it reached the point where I could see

it through the door it proved to be Burton.

“I tummin’ down to tee 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’ Oodwitch.”

This was a blow.

“Mist’ Oodwitch gave me this too,”

diving a hand into one of his pockets. 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 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. Then I heard her say something to him in an undertone, and he answered,

“No, no!”

After that I heard her low voice in a sort of murmur, as she talked to him to try to persuade him to do something; and his replies—

“No, no; don't want to do up tairs.”

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 whilst she waited to see him get up beyond the chance of return, and then I heard her stir 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, she said, 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.

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. 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 aware that my voice sounded

very unnatural. Hers seemed as soft as usual.

The trees on the street were leafless, and the air was chilly and a little raw as the dusk of the autumn evening fell. I led the way to the next street, and let her in at the broken gate where I had first met Mr. Basham Miles so many 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 toward the now dark house, and I remember the mournful way the white, dry leaves on the lower boughs of the old beech rustled in the chilly wind.

William 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 see

whether he could see us. I determined to take no chances, so, whilst William lit the gas in the dark, cold library, I tripped upstairs 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 man tried to rise to greet her, quickened her step, giving a little exclamation as she protested against his getting up.

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 one and the roses and health of the other set them 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 I drew somewhat apart and left them together, he doing 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, “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 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, that he was not surprised. And then he added, quietly :

“My dear, I used to be in love with your mother, and I never loved anyone 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 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. Out of the somewhat crowded and unappetizing waiter came an order and daintiness which were miraculous.

And when she handed him 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, and when she rose to leave a half hour later 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 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 done her father.

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

We came down the steps 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 come back again, and I went back to the door.

When I came down the steps 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 walked a little way off the walk, and sat down on a

seat under the nearest tree—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, and before I knew it I had forgotten my pride, my jealousy, everything, and had told her all that was in my heart. She did not stop crying immediately, and she did not say a word. But before I was 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 at all. 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.

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

XI

WHEN I went back to Mr. Miles's, which I did not do, I believe, until Elizabeth Dale sent me, 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 till next day.

This I did, and that evening I took Elizabeth Dale to make tea for him again. He seemed really better, and 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 ; and other friends came too, and he saw them.

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

In fact, he appeared so much better that we were all talking about his being out again—all except himself. Therefore I was much shocked the next morning when William 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.

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

By common consent it seemed that I was the person to take charge of arrangements, and William told me he had told him that when he died he wanted me sent for at once.

“An’ dere’s a letter for you, suh,” he said. “Somewhar in he ole secketary. He writ it not long ago, and 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'ything. 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 had 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 was 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 by his mother's.

There was one singular request : that a car-

riage should be provided especially for William 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 autumn sun sank below the horizon, the little funeral procession crept out to the old and now almost disused cemetery looking toward the west, and in the soft afterglow of the evening the remains of Basham Miles were laid to rest beside those of his mother, over which rose a beautiful marble monument with a touching inscription, which I knew was written by him.

There were not a great many people in the church, and they were nearly all old people. 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 senior by three months quietly 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 veil drawn close about her little head she sat far back in the church. 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 servants, William

Kemp and Jane, his wife, to buy them a house and lot of their own; left me his library; left his watch to Burton Dale Davis. And then gave, "The old Bible, once his mother's, together with all the rest of his 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 was particularly stated to be but a request.

But I feel sure that he 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, under which Basham Miles re-

membered his mother, 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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THE OLD GENTLEMAN
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THOMAS NELSON PAGE