Lizzie Melton,

A

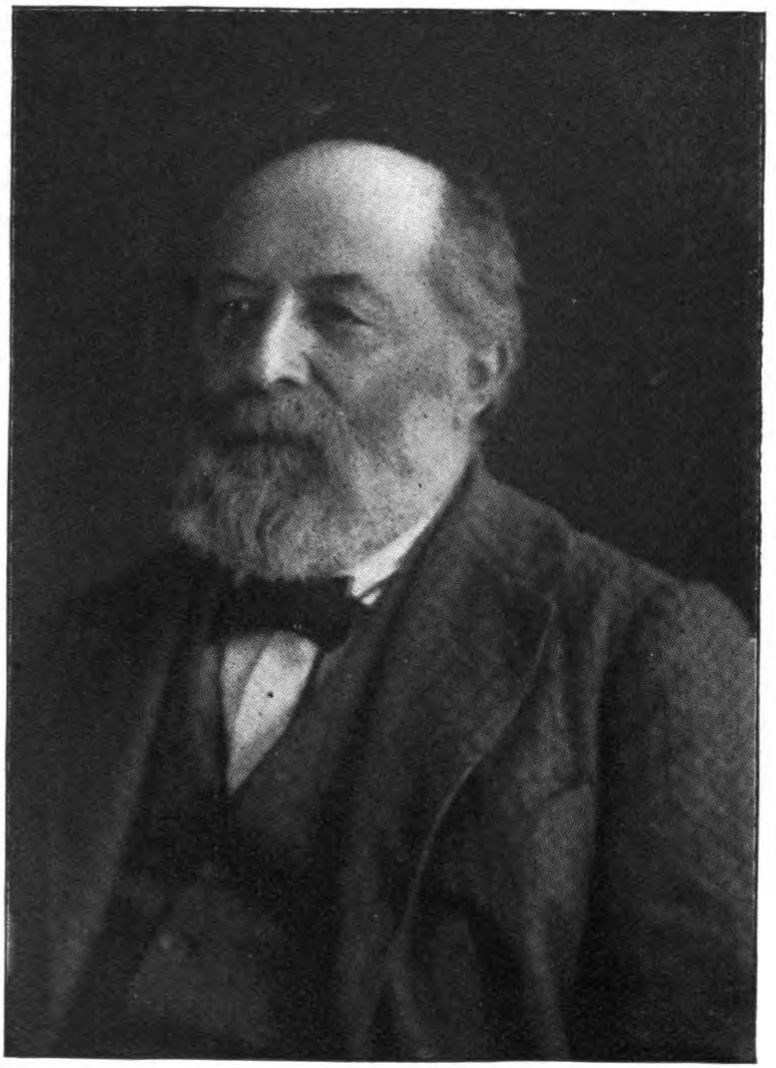
SELF-RELIANT GIRL.

BY

ALBERT CHAVANNES.

Author of In Brighter Climes, The Future Commonwealth, etc.

KNOXVILLE, TENN.



Albert Chavannes

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PREFACE.

A lady to whom I gave the manuscript of this novel to read, said as she handed it back to me; "You have written a very radical novel, Mr. Chavannes." "I hope not," I answered, "for it certainly was not my intention." As other persons who read this story may have the same thought, I think it best to say a few words of explanation.

This novel was commenced many years ago, at a time when I was away from home visiting some friends, and as is often the case on such occasions, some of the time hung heavy on my hands. Being away from my usual occupations, and looking around for some method of spending my spare time, I thought I would put in execution an old plan of mine, to try and find out if I could write a novel. It was a harmless experiment, and whether it ended in success or failure, would at least serve my purpose of passing some idle hours. I then wrote the opening chapters, and once commenced, I kept working at it when nothing of more importance presented itself as an occupation.

In thinking up a proper plot for my novel, I happened to remember an itinerant music teacher, whose acquaintance I had made soon after the war of secession when living in Central New York, and thought that I could make a suitable hero out of the man, and that in that section of the country I might find a suitable background for any story I might write. But a novel is not complete without something of a love story, and I found myself unable to select a plot which I thought I could work out to my satisfaction. I had, in my time, read so many novels, that I found myself obliged to reject plot after plot because they were simply plagiarism upon well-known authors.

Seeking thus for something original, and which had not been written threadbare, the thought came to my mind that I had often wondered why some of the writers who have achieved fame in the field of fiction, do not attack in their novels the present double standard of morality, and show that often it is the man, and not the woman, who ought to be punished by society; and I decided to select that as part of the plot of my story, but I had no desire to write a radical novel, and the misfortunes and trials of Lizzie Melton were to

be simply an incident intended to replace the usual love story.

However I met the fate which I suppose overtakes many a novelist. I had written but few chapters, when I found myself much more interested in Lizzie's character and trials, than in the doings of a worthless man like Prof. Platt, and without any intention of mine, I wrote an entirely different story from what I had first proposed. I hope I have not written a radical novel, but if it is so considered it will show that such writings are needed, and I certainly believe that if such novels were more common, much misery would be avoided, and it would prevent many family tragedies.

I may add here that Prof. Platt is the only character sketched from life, all the others being composite pictures from persons I have known, but the description of the country around Richland and all the incidents mentioned, from the breaking up of the ice to the accident at the county fair, are taken from actual experiences, and are told as near as possible as they happened.

Albert Chavannes,
Knoxville, Tenn.

LIZZIE MELTON.

CHAPTER I.

THE STRANGER.

On a bright afternoon in the fall of 1865, Farmer Melton was returning home from Nettleburgh.

Nettleburgh is the chief town of Melrose county in the state of New York, and is situated in that hilly region in the central part of the state, which divides the valley of the Susquehannah from lake Erie. Farmer Melton's home was near Richland, one of the many picturesque little villages which nestle all over those hills, and the road he was following is the highway leading up a broad valley, and winding along and across a good-sized stream which waters that fertile country. The valley broadens as it nears Richland, its level surface extending nearly a mile across, and the hills that surround it become broken

by many depressions, marking the outlet of small rivulets which, bubbling merrily in their downward course from higher regions, join their waters to the larger stream.

The highway in the valley is lined with substantial farm houses, which at the time I write of were yet of the barn-like pattern so much affected by the early settlers. Large white parallelograms, with narrow eaves, small windows destitute of blinds, and only ornamented by small porticos over the front door, which opens into a wide hall separating the house into two equal parts, and leading to the kitchen beyond. These houses are set in narrow front yards, as if the original owners had grudged the land and objected to waste any for ornamental purposes, and would have looked very homely if the whole landscape had not been redeemed by magnificent elm trees which grew all along the stream, and the beautiful maple groves which had been spared by the first settlers, not as might be supposed to gratify their æsthetic tastes, but just for the substantial addition to their table furnished by the sweet sap in the early spring.

Nature was at her best just then, for the trees had clothed themselves in their most vivid fall colors, thus contrasting in a most

pleasing manner with the emerald green of the meadows; these natural beauties of coloring going very far to redeem the glassy white of the houses, as well as tone down the brick red of the out-buildings.

But Farmer Melton was not admiring the landscape at that moment. He had been away all day, and although the night was yet distant, it was time to reach home so as to help the home folks to do the chores. For all that region is a dairy country, and the cows have to be brought down to the valley from the pastures on the hillsides, and have to be milked, and he did not want that all this work should fall on his wife and daughters. There was his nephew Charles, to be sure, but he was no great help, although he was willing enough, but his health was not very good and he was not used to that kind of work, besides Mr. Melton knew well enough that the women were ever ready to cuddle him and that they would not let him help them to any extent.

But these thoughts did not trouble him much, for it was not in his nature to be easily disturbed. John Melton was a comfortable man. Not only in comfortable circumstances, for he had a fair share of this world's goods,

but he was comfortable in body as well as in mind. A middle-aged man, with a heavy, substantial body, a large head, round face clean shaven, deep-set blue eyes which in repose had a dreamy expression, and a shock of stiff gray hair which, cut about an inch in length, bristled out in all directions. He looked indeed the picture of careless comfort as he lolled back in his low, broad old-fashioned buggy, with the top partly down so as to give him the benefit of the rays of the setting sun, and the loose curtain behind flopping in the breeze like a rag fluttering out of a rent in the rear of a ragged urchin's breeches.

"It's time I was getting home," thought Mr. Melton as he looked at the sun which was nearing the tree tops. "There's all the cows to milk, and mother and Lizzie will have it all done before I get there. Here, Fan! you must go a little faster," and he reached out to get the whip to touch his old mare, which used to his easy ways was jogging comfortably along.

But just then the road made a turn, and not far ahead of him he saw a man walking in the same direction he was going.

Now it was not right, according to his ideas of politeness, to hurry his horse just as he

was about to pass a man on foot. It looked as if he was afraid to be asked for a ride, and it was not customary in these parts to refuse one if politely asked for. So, at the sight, Mr. Melton held his hand and the whip already raised did not fall, but was gently put back in the socket, and Fan, conscious of the respite, kept her easy jog trot as before.

The man on the road, as seen by Mr. Melton, seemed to be of middle age, rather tall, spare, with broad shoulders and long limbs loosely put together. He walked with a long stride, but with a slight limp, as if one of his legs was stiff. "A stranger," thought Mr. Melton who knew every man, woman and child around. "And a soldier too, or I am much mistaken. I must give him a lift as far as I go."

As he neared him, the stranger stopped and turned round holding up his hand, and Mr. Melton drove to the side of the road. "Ho! Ho! Fan, old girl," he said. "Get in, get in, you are quite welcome to a ride if that is what you want."

"Thank you," said the man. "I will be glad to ride with you. But what I wanted to know is how far it is to Richland yet, and if this is the right road."

"You are all right, sir, and I am going that way myself. So get in and welcome." Making room by his side.

The man got in. "Now Fan, hurry up, old lady, and show the gentlemam that you can travel if you take a notion."

Fan pricked up her ears and started at an improved pace, and Mr. Melton turning to his companion and looking at him inquisitively, said: "You are a soldier, are you not?"

The man looked askance at Mr. Melton before he replied. The expression of his face was in complete contrast with that of his host, whose countenance beamed with good nature and whose eyes had an honest look which inspired confidence to all beholders. And yet the stranger was not bad looking, and his appearance was such as would prove attractive to many women. A dark, swarthy face, with prominent cheek bones and straight hair suggesting a slight admixture of Indian blood. His nose was large and straight, his mouth wide and thin lipped, and when he spoke it opened and shut with a stiff motion which reminded one of the opening and shutting of a tortoise shell. His eyes were his best feature; they were dark, intelligent, inquisitive, but with a certain suggestion of shrewdness,

which at times deepened into a furtive look as if their owner had cause to be on guard and was anxious for his personal safety. The man might not be dishonest, but a better judge of human nature than Farmer Melton would have easily seen that he was scheming and unscrupulous. It was not however in the nature of the whole souled man to suspect any one, and especially a soldier of the union army, who had seen service in the war and had probably been wounded in the good cause as was shown by his limping condition.

Probably the stranger was better skilled in reading faces, for after glancing at the comfortable looking man at his side, he answered frankly:

"Yes sir, I am a soldier and have been through most of the war, and still carry a bullet in my leg in remembrance of our friends the enemy."

"I thought so, I thought so," continued Mr. Melton, who had a peculiar habit of repeating his words. "Pretty hard luck I call it, after all your campaigning to have to trudge on our roads on foot. And where are you going, if I may be so bold as to ask?"

"It is no secret," answered the stranger, "and if you live in this neighborhood you can

probably tell me where I had better stay to-night. I am going to Richland to see if I can get up a singing school. I am a Professor of music, and since the end of the war I have made a living by giving music lessons and teaching singing classes."

"Well, well, you hit it just right if that is your business. I live within a mile of Richland and my daughters are real fond of music. Adeline, that's my youngest, she plays the organ at the Methodist church, and Lizzie, that's the oldest, she has a powerful voice and leads the choir. Now you come right along with me and stay all night with us and get acquainted with the girls, and they'll help you all they can with the greatest pleasure."

"Thank you sir, I'll accept your invitation and be delighted to make the acquaintance of your daughters," answered the stranger who had no objection to use fine words. "But allow me to introduce myself to you," and he pulled out an elaborate card case from which he handed Farmer Melton a bit of pasteboard.

"Hey! What's that?" exclaimed the worthy man as he reached out his hand to receive it. "Oh! yes, I see! Your visiting card. Here, take it back, take it back, I couldn't read it without my specks. Just tell me your name,

Mine is John Melton, and now that you know me what might your name be?"

"Professor Franklin S. Platt, at your service, Mr. Melton, and allow me to express my gratification at this opportune meeting. I heard of you and your daughters at Melrose, and was advised to call upon you, for you and your family would be sure to help me in my endeavors."

"Indeed, that's good. We have many friends in Melrose, and I reckon my wife is known even there for her generous hospitality. But here we are at the end of our journey."

CHAPTER II.

A SELF-RELIANT GIRL.

The Meltons' house was not one of the large, white, barn-like structures spoken of in the first chapter. The man who built it had ideas of his own and had departed from the traditions of his fathers, and erected a square brick house of odd character, both roomy and convenient, but no improvement upon the standard pattern so far as looks were concerned. The walls at the ends projected above the

roof, and finished in steps gave it a prison-like appearance, while the very narrow eaves in front looked as if they had been clipped even with the wall with a pair of shears. No porch or portico broke the dead uniformity of the side turned to the street, and it would have looked very bare indeed if it had not been almost entirely hidden from view by two fine Norwegian pines growing in the diminutive front yard. The cheerless aspect of the premises was greatly relieved by a fine lawn of over two acres in extent which stretched to the right of the building, and laid out in walks and ornamented with shrubbery, testified to the improved taste of the present possessors.

If the exterior was bare and forbidding, the interior was roomy and pleasant. The front door, on one side of the building, opened into a large hall, wide enough to be used as a cozy sitting room. From the hall, doors led into the parlor and dining rooms, each having, according to the fashion of those days, a small bed room attached. The parlor bed room, as it was called, was reserved for the honored guests, while the other was used by the heads of the family. Upstairs were the bed rooms of the children, and a wing extending to the

rear of the building contained the kitchen and pantry.

As they stopped in front of the yard, Mr. Melton left his guest to make the best of his way into the house, while he went to the barn to put up his horse and see about helping the women folks.

"Walk right in, Mr. Platt," he said, "walk right in. You will find some of the women inside. Just tell them I invited you and they'll make you welcome."

Prof. Platt did as he was bidden, and opening the door, found himself in the presence of a good looking girl who turned upon him a pair of inquiring eyes.

The Professor was not bashful by nature, and long experience had taught him how to present himself to strangers. Pulling off his hat and making an elaborate bow worthy of a dancing master, he soon introduced himself.

"Miss Melton, I suppose," he said. "Excuse me Miss, for my unceremonious entrance, but I came with your father, and he directed me to walk in while he took his horse to the barn."

"Nothing to excuse, sir," said the young lady. "So father has returned and you came with him?"

"Yes, Miss Melton, he overtook me on the

road some two or three miles from here, and when he found out my errand he kindly offered that I stay all night with him. My name is Franklin S. Platt, Professor of music, and I intend to open a singing school in Richland if I find enough scholars."

While Prof. Platt was speaking, he was looking at the girl and mentally taking stock of her. Lizzie Melton, for it was the oldest daughter, was a fine specimen of womanhood. Not a beauty, her features were too decided for that, but still with her erect form and quiet but positive ways, she attracted a good deal of notice and commanded the respect of all those who knew her. A little above middle height, with rounded and tapering limbs, a little too large for graceful motion, but indicative of strength, she had a face which showed some of her father's good nature, tempered by a good deal of quiet determination. Her hair, worn short and curly, was yellow with a strong red tinge in it, which made it shine in certain lights like burnished copper. Her nose was large and straight and her lips full, but neither sweet nor voluptuous in expression. Her chief charm and attraction was in her eyes, grayish blue, clear, deep, inquisitive, resolute. The eyes of an

honest, fearless woman, who does her own thinking, and is not afraid to stand by her decision. A self-reliant girl, strong in body as well as in mind, the product of the new civilization. One of the ever-increasing class of women who have for their mission to raise their sisters from the state of semi-servitude which is yet the lot of women in the half civilized ages in which we linger.

Lizzie Melton had not only been well endowed by nature, but in some respects her education had been very different from that which usually falls to young girls in the country. I am not speaking here of school education, for she had only attended the public schools of the place, with one year at a high school in Nettleburgh, but I am speaking of education in its highest sense, that which is imparted by our surroundings.

Mr. Melton, with all his love of comfort and his easy-going ways, was by temperament a good deal of a philosopher. His father had so far wandered from the orthodox fold as to join the Universalists, and the son had never felt any sympathy for the doctrine of eternal punishment. There was something repugnant to a man so full of kindly feelings towards all his fellow-men, in the idea of God having

created and invested with responsibility beings who could not stand temptations, and of his punishing these creatures of his own hands by plunging them in a pit of everlasting fire and brimstone. At the time of which I write, orthodoxy had not yet been modified by the higher criticism to which the Bible is subject in our days, and a belief in a literal hell was yet one of the standing articles of faith of all the churches, except in the most educated and cultured cities. In Boston and other places, the Unitarians were slowly gaining ground, and the spread of scientific knowledge was already throwing a feeling of doubt upon many of the cherished tenets of Christianity, but in the country and among the farmers, the old traditions were still accepted in their entirety, and skepticism was comparatively unknown. So that Mr. Melton did not find many who sympathized with his liberal views, which did not prevent him however from doing a great deal of silent thinking, and of reading a great many books and papers not usually found in the possession of men in his position. The works of Darwin and Spencer had not yet become popular, and he had but little scientific knowledge as foundation for his unorthodoxy, but he was in sym-

pathy with all advanced ideas, and while he was not himself a reformer, being entirely too easy and peaceful to come out openly against the prevailing ideas, yet his silent influence and quaint remarks at propitious times had left their marks upon those who came in constant contact with him.

His wife was a member in good standing of the Methodist church, and her husband's views had only influenced her so far as to make her much more charitable in her judgments than she was when they were married. The contrast between her husband's cheerful views of life and his trust in the goodness of his creator, with the censorious tendencies of puritanism, and the dismal prospect of eternal punishment for the largest part of mankind, when brought to her notice by daily association, had certainly weakened her early beliefs, and while she still joined in the religious ceremonies and duties which occupied a large portion of her time, it was more a result of habit than because her heart would not have been satisfied without it.

Jane Melton was not a worldly woman, but she enjoyed society and style, and in these rural parts one may as well be out of society as not to be connected with a church, and

she had much more satisfaction in fulfilling her duties as a good church member, than she would have found in listening to her husband's arguments upon the contradictions in the Bible, and being convinced by them so as to set her in discord with her neighbors. It was pleasant enough to have doubts cast upon the doctrine of eternal damnation, and to be able to hope that the dreaded punishment would not be meted out to unregenerated sinners, but she could see no reason why, even if it was so, she should break her connection with the church.

Her youngest daughter, Adeline, was very much like her in features and character, and was also a church member. She had been converted many years before at a revival, where the protracted services had sufficiently excited her to lead her to the mourners' bench, from which she had graduated a full-fledged church member and Christian. Nor had she ever regretted her profession of religion. To a girl of her quick and lively nature, and social disposition, the church offers a safe place for enjoyment, and even some times for mild dissipation. The sermons were often long and dreary, it is true, but then one is not expected to listen to them all the

time, and the mind is allowed to wander to more pleasant subjects. And if the sermons were long, was there not the pleasure of dressing for church, and the satisfaction of knowing that the last acquisition would be duly admired, and what other place so convenient to display the new bonnet? Then there was the playing of the organ which Adeline thoroughly enjoyed, and the choir meetings, and perhaps best of all, the Sunday school and her class of young boys just old enough to be interesting, and the superintendent, Mr. Talbot, such a nice man—with a sickly wife who could not come to church—who seemed so ready to take her advice, and had so much respect—real or assumed—for her opinions, always wanting her to select the tunes and to have her come up and stand by his side in front of the school to help him lead the singing, when he would hold her book for her, and soon leaving her to lead, join his deep bass to her somewhat shrill soprano.

For if the truth must be told, Adeline was very much inclined to flirt, and found great enjoyment in men's society, and if her entrance into the church did not have much influence upon her conduct, it had opened to her very pleasant opportunities. Mother and

daughter belonged to that numerous class of church members who are carried along by the current which surrounds them, and are Christians, not by conviction but through association. Those persons drift along easily and naturally in a position which offers them at little expense and trouble, a large amount of social enjoyment.

But Lizzie was entirely different. She was not easily swayed by surrounding circumstances, and the excitement of revivals had no effect upon her. She went to church regularly, but not to show her new dresses or meet the young men who attended, but because she dearly loved music, and on account of her strong voice had been selected to lead in the singing of the congregation. Then it also broke the monotony of the dreary Sabbath in a community where even pleasure driving on that day, if not looked upon exactly as a sin, was certainly not encouraged.

So Lizzie had not only not joined the church, but she had read her father's books, and in them her strong brain had found the intellectual food that just suited her. Philosophical questions which had presented themselves to her father in a hazy form, and that he had only sufficiently understood so as to throw

doubt upon previous opinions, had been grasped by Lizzie in all their meaning, and she had worked them out to their ultimate conclusions. Lizzie not only had a logical mind, but she had a strong moral fiber which led her to give practical results to what she believed to be right, and in some respects she was much stronger than her father. Had she lived in a large city she would evidently have been a reformer, for she had all the qualifications for the task, but in her present surroundings they lacked the necessary conditions for their development.

But if she was not a reformer, she sympathized with all reform movements, and was especially interested in all the efforts that led in the direction of the emancipation of her sex. At that time women doctors and lawyers were practically unknown, and it was very seldom that a woman was seen either upon the lecture platform or in the pulpit, but the agitation which has opened to them so many new occupations was already commenced, and it had struck a responsive chord in Lizzie's heart. To a person of her character, there is something degrading in the dependent position in which women are situated, and nothing perhaps chafed Lizzie more

in the religious ceremonies to which she assisted, than the assumed superiority of the men over the women of the congregation. She was a thorough believer in the equality of the sexes, and ever ready to do battle in its behalf in and out of season. Unknown to herself at the time, she was soon to be compelled to fight a harder battle for the equal standing of women in society, than often falls to the lot of those who devote their whole lives to the work of reform.

It will be easily understood that there could not be much sympathy between an educated tramp such as Prof. Platt and a person of Lizzie's character, and that in this first interview he did not make a very favorable impression upon her. She treated him courteously while it fell to her lot to entertain him, but left the room as soon as her father joined them. But her coolness did not seem to much disturb the Professor. He was an adept in the art of securing a living at the expense of others, and had already come to the conclusion that for the present his lot had fallen into pleasant places, and that it would be the part of wisdom to stay as long as possible in such desirable quarters.

CHAPTER III.

THE CHOIR MEETING.

Farmer Melton and his guest had not been long engaged in conversation when the door leading to the dining room was opened, and a cheery voice called out: "Supper is ready, father, come and bring the gentleman with you," and the owner of the voice would have beaten a hasty retreat if Mr. Melton had not interfered. "Here, 'Deline, come in and be introduced to Professor Platt. He is a music teacher, and you and him will find plenty to talk together."

Adeline, a really pretty girl, with merry black eyes and a wealth of black hair, coiled in heavy tresses over her small round head, came in with a giggle in sharp contrast with the cool and dignified demeanor of her sister. She was a great favorite among her acquaintances, but it was due to her pleasant ways and easy temper, and not because of any intellectual attainments. A lively, healthy, foolish girl, she was just the person to be taken in by fine words and showy conversation, and the Professor had no trouble to decide that

it would be wise for him to cultivate her acquaintance and to give her sister a wide berth. So he lost no time in ingratiating himself by complimenting Mr. Melton on his daughters "two such fine girls as any man might be proud of, sir," and by so doing made his place more secure in the good will of the fond father, although it is doubtfull if Lizzie would have been pleased to hear him, an entire stranger, express any opinion about them whatever. It was undoubtedly presumption on his part, but Prof. Platt knew how to be presumptuous at the right time, and understood all the bummer's arts.

In the dining room he was introduced to Mrs. Melton, who received him with many excuses for the plain fare of the evening meal, explaining that they had been busy and did not look for company. These excuses were certainly not needed, for she was too good a housekeeper to ever be caught unawares, but it was part of Mrs. Melton's social etiquette to always depreciate the dishes she placed before her guests, and the habit was so strong upon her that even in her own family she never seemed satisfied with the result of the labor of her own hands. Of course this humility was all assumed, and was due to a

desire to draw out praises from her guests, a common device with persons of weak characters, who are very sensitive to the opinion of others. Her husband, who was not at all affected in the same manner, would often make fun of her and either mimic her ways, or which was even worse, take her at her own words.

"Where is Charles, mother?" he said after they had sat down at the table, noticing a vacant chair. "He is the only one of the family you have not seen yet, Professor," he said turning to his guest, "and yet you must for the last few years have seen many of his friends," and as the Professor looked at him inquisitively, he continued, "Charles is a rebel, Professor, or at least was one, and is now a reconstructed citizen of the United States, although it must be acknowledged that so far as his reconstruction is concerned it seems a poor job, and that we cannot pride ourselves upon our success. However I hope that you will both keep the peace, and now that the war is ended will not feel it necessary to fight your battles over."

"No danger on my part, Mr. Melton," answered the Professor. "I have had my fill of fighting for a time, and certainly in no case

would say anything that could hurt the feelings of one of your family. But how does it happen that such a good union man as you should have a son in the rebel army?"

"Charles is not my son, although we treat him as one, and he was not raised in the North. He is a nephew of mine, the son of a young sister who went down South to teach many years ago. But here he comes. Let me introduce the blue and the gray to each other."

These words accompanied the entrance of a tall, slim youth, with soft features and languid, sleepy blue eyes, and whose long, drooping blond mustache alone relieved from the charge of effeminacy.

"Here, Charles, my boy, let me introduce you to Professor Platt, one of your old enemies," said Mr. Melton. "Prof. Platt, Charles Delormes, from Mobile, Alabama, lately released from the Elmira prison."

"Most happy to make your acquaintance, Mr. Delormes," said the Professor rising from the table and making one of his elaborate bows. "It is much more pleasant to meet you here around this hospitable board, than on the field of battle where we might have met not so very long ago."

Charles Delormes muttered some words of

acknowledgment, but did not seem much inclined to enter into friendly relations with the stranger, and sitting down by the side of Lizzie, with whom if we judge by the look they exchanged he seemed to be on very good terms, took but little part in the conversation.

Either by chance, or through calculation of the girl, the Professor had been seated near Adeline, and these two soon became engaged in conversation upon questions relating to musical matters. The Professor explained his views as to the best method for conducting a singing school. He intended to secure subscriptions of money up to a certain amount, and when a sufficient sum was secured to pay him, to teach all comers while the money lasted. He said that he had found this plan much better than to teach only those who were subscribers. He could get many subscriptions from persons who did not care to attend regularly, but yet were willing to contribute money if it would help to improve the singing of the whole community, and for his part he found it much more interesting to teach a large class than only a few scholars, for then his pupils were drawn from those who had the most taste for music, and not from those who had the most money.

As he warmed to his subject, he made a good impression on his hearers, and Lizzie soon found herself listening to him with great interest. She could quickly recognize that, whatever his failings, he loved his profession and was genuinely anxious to prove a good teacher. Lizzie was fond of music and had a fine voice, but never had any training, and it was the first time in her life that she heard a man who had any pretense to a musical education discourse on those subjects.

The choir meeting happened to be on that same night, and as Prof. Platt desired to become acquainted with the persons most interested in singing, it was soon decided that he would go with Charles and the girls, and be introduced to the other members of the choir.

The choir meeting was held in the Methodist church, a modest little edifice at the other end of the village, and a little more than a mile from the Meltons' farm. The church was built of wood, painted white, and set in a large yard surrounded by the sheds which are a matter of necessity in these rural regions to shelter in winter the teams of the worshippers. The pulpit fronted the entrance, and the choir sat in a gallery directly over the hall, looking towards the preacher.

In this gallery, a little before eight o'clock half a dozen persons were assembled waiting for the Melton girls. It was such a motley gathering as is usually found on such occasions. Mrs. Sauderson, a widow and the town milliner, conspicuous by a baby face surrounded by corkscrews ringlets, trying to look demure as required by her unprotected position, and who, gossip said, came to the choir meeting as part of her scheme to entrap Jim Rollings, a farmer of rubicund countenance, substantial in body and in purse, and who had so far escaped the wiles of womankind. Mary Tatom, a buxom, irrepressible girl, quick of speech, sharp at repartee, careless of appearances, and ever on the brink of losing her reputation, but somehow and someway always coming out of her scrapes scot-free; probably because her misdemeanors were all of a harmless kind, and that she was careless of appearances because she had nothing to hide from the world. Then there was Mr. and Mrs. Partley, a young married couple yet much enamored of each other, and who, while supposed to play propriety for the young girls' sake, were really so spooney as to give a bad example, and were in great danger of leading them into temptation. One

or two unimportant characters, and last, but not least, William Horner, the choir leader, a powerfully built young man of twenty-eight, six feet in height, broad in the shoulders, strong in chest, and with his handsome face, kindly black eyes, short black mustache, as fine a specimen of humanity as one could wish to see. He was related to the Meltons, and at one time there had been much talk of a match between him and Lizzie, but the talk had died out although he still visited there, and they were yet on friendly terms. The knowing ones, who think they know the why and wherefore of everything, asserted that it was Charles Delormes' coming which had made the change, and that Lizzie now cared more for her cousin than for her old lover.

Soon the noise of feet was heard on the stairway, and the voice of Prof. Platt in conversation with Adeline created a silence among the expectant company, for it harbored that very rare occurrence, a visit from a stranger.

Adeline, who had managed to secure the Professor's company all the way, and had much enjoyed his conversation, felt quite proud in introducing him as Professor Platt to the choir members, by whom he was cordially

welcomed, especially by William Horner, who, a plain farmer, keenly felt his deficiencies as a choir leader.

Under his leadership the exercises of the choir had always been very simple, for in those days the congregation was still expected to take part in the singing, and the object of the choir was to lead the whole body of worshippers. So, easy and well known tunes were rehearsed for the hymns selected by the preacher, and gossip and light talk usually took up a good share of the hour. But already that evening the presence of a good music teacher was recognized, and a course of practical study inaugurated, which by the end of the winter had made a wonderful improvement in the singing. But few hymns had been sung when Prof. Platt began to give directions, and they soon realized his ability to teach, and they all seconded William Horner's suggestion that he take his place and give them a first lesson. This the Professor declined, but said he would make a proposition. It was that they should practice an Anthem to be sung by the choir alone, while the preacher was taking his place, and during the seating of the congregation. In accord with this suggestion, the beautiful refrain of

that grand Anthem "The Earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof" soon filled the little building, and under the Professor's firm and skilful direction, the little band of singers even that evening made such music as sounded very different from the desultory singing with which they had been obliged to remain satisfied until that moment.

By this shrewd move Prof. Platt had no trouble in attaining his object, for it gave him an opportunity to show that he was truly competent, and his fine and well modulated tenor, which in the solos rang with a clearness of enunciation to which they had not been accustomed, proved such an addition as to gain him at once the good will of all the members present, and before they dispersed he had received enough assurances of help in getting up his school to feel certain of success, and he realized as he left the building with Adeline on his arm, pouring forth in her girlish way her admiration of his talent, that it would be his own fault if he did not spend many months in his new quarters.

CHAPTER IV.

CHARLES DELORMES.

About thirty years before the time when our story opens, Kate, a younger sister of John Melton, had gone South to teach in a private family. In those days it was a common occurrence with northern girls, and what was nearly as common, she had married there a worthless scion of an aristocratic family. Charles was her only son, and had always been petted by his mother, who had vied with her daughters in spoiling him, with the usual result of making him wilful and self-opinionated. During the war, his father had held a civil office under the government, but Charles had at once volunteered his services, and despite his mother's tears and entreaties, had joined the armies of Lee, and taken part in many of the most important battles of the war. And he had made a good soldier, showing great respect for the army discipline, combined with a plentiful supply of physical courage, and that pluck and endurance which distinguished the southern troops, and was largely due to their inheritance from adventurous ancestors. For

blood will tell, and Charles was a true scion of the south, and in embryo a perfect type of the high-bred, irascible, generous and tyrannical slave holder, the product of generations of contact with a servile race forcibly submissive to the caprices, as well as dependent upon the generosity of their masters.

If Charles was courageous and had made a good soldier, he had not been very lucky in escaping the evil fortunes of the war, and while it might be said that he could be thankful that he had not lost his life in some of the many desperate engagements in which he had participated, he had been wounded twice, the last time seriously, and had fallen a prisoner in the hands of the Federals. After spending several weeks in the hospitals, he had been sent to the prison at Elmira, where in his enfeebled and semi-convalescent state, he had suffered from insufficient food and harsh if not positively cruel treatment.

At the end of the war he had been released, and short of funds and broken in health, had gladly taken advantage of the nearness of his uncle's family, and accepted their hospitality instead of returning at once to his parents. His uncle, although an enthusiastic supporter of the Union, had received him

with open arms, and his wife and daughters had adopted him at once as one of the family. Naturally slender in appearance, his suffering had reduced him to a bare skeleton, and his wound, never entirely closed, kept him in a precarious condition. His need of care, his isolation, and probably his weakness of character and soft, feminine ways, had strongly endeared him to Lizzie, who took him at once under her special protection and lavished upon him her large store of reserved affection. In girls of her strong physique and sanguine temperament, the maternal instinct is always latent, ready to manifest itself at the slightest provocation, and in the many weeks which followed his arrival among them, when he had to keep his room and often his bed, she nursed him and petted him and bore with him, with that unwearied patience and sustained cheerfulness which are the crowning glory of a strong woman of kindly disposition.

And these two had thus been thrown constantly in each other's society under conditions that could not but bring them very close together. Not only had Lizzie's constant nursing and dressing of his wound broken down much of the reserve which exists usually between the sexes, but she had become his

confidante and intimate friend. The poor boy, with all his unregulated impulses and feminine weakness, had an affectionate disposition, and used to the petting of his mother and sisters, was often despondent in the tedious days of slow recovery and craved the caresses of his cousin, which she lavished upon him as freely as if he had been a child, and without any other thought but to please him and cheer his drooping spirits.

But there was danger in the intimacy that she little suspected, and little by little the reserve which is the surest safeguard in such a position had been entirely broken, and as Charles regained health and strength, instead of ceasing, as she had expected, to call upon her for sympathy and caresses, he had become more urgent in his demands upon her, and no longer satisfied to be treated as a friend, wanted to become her lover, and at times was urging her to break all barriers between them and satisfy his passions.

This much must be said in extenuation of his conduct, that so far as he was able to plan his own life, he intended to marry her, for she had become necessary to him, and in a selfish way he undoubtedly loved her.

Charles was not deliberately wicked, but

there was a strain of wild blood in him, another inheritance from his slaveholding ancestry, who surrounded by absolute dependents, had seldom been taught the necessity of controlling their desires, and have always indulged more or less in sexual dissipation. In that respect, as well as in the qualities which make a good soldier, Charles was old and experienced beyond his years, and with his nice pleading ways, effeminate manners, and outbursts of childish temper, was really much more dangerous to Lizzie than would have been a man of a more determined disposition, for she could not be angry with him, and treated him as she would have treated a spoiled child; but unknown to her he was slowly undermining her power of resistance, and it might fail her at the critical moment.

Lizzie was not in love with her cousin, but he had called out from her that exceedingly great affection that strong, positive women usually bestow on their children, and which often leads them to accede to foolish whims if they can thereby minister to their enjoyment. Nor had Lizzie any intention of marrying him, although he had pleaded his cause with all the ability at his command, for she appreciated the weakness of his character too

well to take him for her husband. Not that she ever expected to promise to obey any man, no matter how much her intellectual superior he might be, but she certainly was not going to risk her happiness by uniting her life, even on terms of equality, with a man whose character she could not respect, or in whom she could not repose perfect trust.

Nor had she any intention of granting him the desired favors, for she was not of a voluptuous nature, and had no desire for such association, and at first had chided him severely, making the mistake of treating him as an overgrown boy.

And her confidence in her strength had been her undoing. As the drop of water continually falling wears out the hardest stone, Charles, with a knowledge due to past experience, had persisted in his demands, until, in an hour of weakness, she had surrendered, as thousands of women have done before, induced by the kindness of her heart.

Let us remember in judging of her conduct, that Lizzie had no religious scruples on the subject, and that she was strongly imbued with the belief in a doctrine which claims for woman the right to control all her actions. So it was not on account of moral considera-

tions that she had been prompted in her persistent refusal, but because her good sense told her that it is best not to do anything to offend public opinion. She valued her reputation, not because she cared personally what people thought of her, but she knew that her chances of happiness would be greatly lessened in the surroundings where she lived if the tongue of the scandalmongers should once be turned against her.

But these reasons, while strong enough to prevent her from entering coolly and deliberately into illicit relations with him, had not been strong enough to enable her to resist his pleadings, and in a moment of weakness to which all women are liable, she had submitted to his wishes, to her great future mortification.

For Lizzie had found, what many a girl had experienced before, that such liaisons are not easily broken. She had at once, and several times later, made efforts to end their relations, but the same influence Charles possessed over her, strengthened by the fact that now her reputation was in his hands, and that such characters as he are ever ready to use all the weapons in their hands, had proven too strong for her, and she had finally decided that only

one course was open to her, and it was to compel Charles to leave their home and return to his parents.

Lizzie at that time was in a difficult position. She was beginning to be uneasy about herself, and to be afraid that her liaison with Charles might have results which would cast a shadow upon her whole life, and cause great sorrow to her parents. And yet, if her fears were realized, she was as decided as ever not to marry her cousin, for under the conditions it would have seemed to her a cowardly surrender to a false public opinion, and a tacit acknowledgment of the dependent position of women. Not only did she know that such a marriage would wreck her happiness but she felt also that the only inducement Charles could offer her was that fancied protection which a man is supposed to give to the woman who takes his name. To have Charles Delormes, the weak and capricious boy, whose very dependence of character and inability to stand pain and loneliness had been the cause of her predicament, act as a shield between her and the reproaches of the world, was something that a girl of her character and self-reliance could not accept. No, perish the thought! She would prefer to flee to the

obscurity of a great city, and earn her bread by the sweat of her brow, than to degrade herself by a marriage entered into from such low motives.

No, Lizzie may have been weak, as the strongest woman will be at times, and she may have been lacking in a proper regard for the moral sanction to her actions as taught by the Christian religion, but she had too much independence of character to degrade herself by what she considered a cowardly action, and too high an ideal of the relations of husband and wife to enter into them prompted by such considerations.

Then if her fears should prove unfounded, there was another complication which arose from her feelings for William Horner, and the marked preference he had shown toward her. For it was true that before Charles' arrival William had paid his court to her, and that their old friendship was gradually turning into a love affair. More especially on his side, it must be acknowledged, for Lizzie's heart had not yet been awakened to any soft sentiments, but she liked his company and had great respect for his character, and with a little patience William was in a fair way to win her consent.

But Charles had come and Lizzie's thoughts had been engrossed by him, and her feelings had been awakened in a new direction, so that for some time William had seen but little of her, and when he did succeed in having her company, Charles' influence had cast a shadow upon their mutual relations.

William, however, was a manly fellow, not at all inclined to be jealous, who instead of being vexed with her, had judged pretty accurately of her feelings for her cousin, and knowing that the peculiar conditions which had called them in existence could not last, had decided to bide his time and renew his suit when Charles' health would be restored, believing that when he no longer needed her ministrations, her feelings would change and they would meet once more on their old footing.

And so it had proven. While Lizzie still had a great liking for her cousin, and was perhaps too considerate of his feelings, she had no longer the same affection she had in the beginning, and on the contrary the contrast between the two men had greatly increased her respect for William, and the awakening of new feelings had softened her heart and made her more susceptible to his advances.

But Charles had none of William's magnanimity, and was inclined to jealousy, and had since able to accompany her, made himself unpleasant several times by fits of temper, so that Lizzie felt that if William should continue his attentions to her, and she should be inclined to look favorably on them, that Charles would be greatly in the way, and there would be no peace and happiness for her so long as he remained in the country.

So Lizzie had gradually arrived at a final decision. Charles must return to his parents, or she would leave her home and go to some distant city. Not only was it best that it should be so, but it was an absolute necessity. Their relations must be broken, and the experience of the past weeks had shown her that she could not accomplish it so long as they lived under the same roof, and she felt that if her fears should prove well founded it would be almost impossible for her to refuse to marry him, for to his entreaties would be joined those of her parents.

And marry him she would not, for she was decided that no combinations of circumstances would induce her to enter into a life partnership her mind did not approve or her heart desire. So she had decided to have it out

with Charles at the first opportunity, and no better one could be found than their walk to the choir meeting, when the unexpected company of Prof. Platt relieved them of Adeline's society, and left them free to speak as privately as she could desire.

But Lizzie had not taken advantage of the opportunity in going. They had walked together, but their conversation had been on general subjects, especially about the Professor with whom Charles had not been favorably impressed, probably fearing a possible rival, if not in Lizzie's affection, at least in the good will and favor of her parents. Lizzie had let him run on, not wishing to broach the subject uppermost on her mind until they returned home, fearing a quarrel, knowing that in any case Charles would be put out and act unpleasantly at the choir meeting.

But as soon as they started home, she managed to linger behind with him, and as he, with the easy familiarity that came so natural to him, tried to pass his arm around her waist, she gently disengaged herself, and taking his arm, entered upon the unpleasant task before her.

"Charles," she said, "I have something on my mind which I must tell you."

"Certainly, Lizzie," he answered in a bantering tone. "The least I can do is to help you to relieve your mind. What is it? Something about that old beau of yours?"

"No, Charles, it is something about yourself. I want you to leave Richland and return South."

"You don't mean it?" said Charles somewhat startled. "You are joking now." And a little wrathfully. "Why do you want to send me away Lizzie, is it because I am getting in your way?"

"Now, Charles, do not get vexed, but hear what I have to say patiently. I want you to leave because your stay here can lead to no good, and that you have managed to put me in a false position. I have been to blame and ought never to have given way to you, but what is past cannot be undone. But now we must break off, and Charles you are the one that ought to go."

"Oh! Lizzie dear," in a coaxing tone and soft little pats on the hand that lay on his arm. "Why will you not listen to reason and marry me like the good girl that you are?"

And Charles tried once more to put his arm around her and draw her to him and kiss her on the lips.

But Lizzie was proof against such endearments, and gently repulsing him, continued:

"Your caresses are very pleasant, Charles, but they will not change my opinion as to what I think it right for you to do. You know as well as I do why I do not want to marry you, and it is because you ask from me what my judgment tells me I must not grant that I want you to leave. I have lost faith in myself, Charles, since I so foolishly succumbed to your demands, and I am afraid that I cannot resist you. I have by my weakness endangered my reputation, but I will not knowingly endanger my life's happiness as well as your's by such a union, and I think it best for us to part and thus put an end to all such dangers."

"Oh! Lizzie, how cold and calculating you are," exclaimed Charles in a tone of reproach. "How different from the girl who nursed me while I was sick! Then you were ready to do anything I asked from you, while now you coolly reason and argue, and conjure up a lot of fanciful objections. You loved me then, Lizzie, and do not love me any longer. That's all there is in it, and you might as well acknowledge that you have got tired of me, and hit on that excuse to get rid of me."

"Not tired of you, Charles, and if you would be satisfied with such affection as I can have for a brother, I would be glad to have you remain longer. I think as much of you as I ever did, but you see it is you who have changed, and make demands upon my affection very different from those you made when you first came. Then you wanted nursing, and cheerfulness, and sisterly affection, and these I had to give and gladly bestowed them upon you. But now you want me to love you not as a sister but as a wife, and that love I have never felt for you. It is true I have submitted to your wishes, but not through such love, Charles, but through womanly weakness. And I cannot marry you because I do not love you enough, and that you do not answer to my idea of the man I would take for my husband.

"I do not want to quarrel with you, Charles, we have been too good friends for that, but my mind is made up and we must part. If you refuse to leave Richland, I shall go away myself and not return as long as you stay."

Charles knew Lizzie well enough to understand that she meant what she said, yet he was loth to agree to leave, and when they reached the house he had not yet given the

promise that she required. Yet the final result was not to be mistaken, for Lizzie's character was so much the stronger of the two, that in a contest of wills he was sure to be eventually defeated.

If Lizzie had not been able to leave their home herself, she would not have succeeded so easily, for Charles was not the kind of a man to renounce the advantage that his presence gave him, and her confession of weakness, instead of appealing to his generosity, would have induced him to remain and persevere in his entreaties; but he soon found that Lizzie was in earnest, and he had manhood enough to realize that he must be the one to go.

So he left before many weeks, ignorant of Lizzie's fears which she carefully concealed from him, well knowing that no persuasions or entreaties could have decided him to leave Richland if he had had any idea that their liaison might have any such result.

CHAPTER V.

THE CHRISTMAS TREE.

Professor Platt soon ingratiated himself in the good graces of the Meltons, and managed, as he had expected, to make his home with them during the winter. First, Farmer Melton insisted that he should stay while trying to make up his school, and by the time he had succeeded, his host would not hear of his leaving to seek a boarding place. Charles had by that time announced his determination to return South, and his uncle had made no objection believing that the severe winter of the North would prove too much for his constitution. So Prof. Platt naturally took his place in the family, to the great satisfaction of Adeline, while Lizzie felt her mind considerably relieved by the departure of her cousin.

Prof. Platt, upon further acquaintance proved a very satisfactory guest. If he was one of those men who make a living by sponging upon others, he also had the gift of making himself useful and entertaining. He knew how to do many little things about the house, and was ever ready to help the ladies in their

occupations. He did not try to work on the farm, but he had a knack at fixing things around that delighted Farmer Melton, who had all the carelessness usual to men of his easy disposition.

The singing school proved a great success. For nearly two months, three times a week, a large number of youths of both sexes met at night in the cozy prayer meeting room built at the back of the church, and were thoroughly drilled in music, commencing at the very rudiments and gradually led onward, until they could render successfully any piece of sacred or secular music found in the books in use in those rural districts.

Those two months were for Lizzie a time of quiet enjoyment. The lull before the breaking of the storm which hung dark over her horizon. With the departure of her cousin she had resolutely set aside for the time her dark forebodings, and relieved of the constant restraint caused by his presence, she had given her soul to her great enjoyment of music, and decided to profit to the utmost by the present opportunity. The benefits which she reaped from the Professor's teachings had not been without their due effect upon her feelings toward him, and he was shrewd enough to see

his advantage, and when in her company to keep his defects of character as much as possible in the back ground, and show her more of the singing master and less of the man, so that his domestication in their home was not unpleasant to her.

And at every lesson she met William, who now that Charles was gone sedulously sought her side and paid her a good deal of quiet attention. Lizzie did not encourage him, at least by any open action, for she well knew that should her fears be realized, courtship and marriage would be out of the question, but if she could control her words and actions, she could not so well control her feelings, and her heart having been softened by her past experience, she felt much more the need of affection. So if she could not think of William as a lover, it was pleasant to think of him as a friend, and unconsciously to herself she felt a reassuring influence in his presence; and this feeling of confidence which thus took possession of her when they were together added much to her enjoyment of the music lessons.

As for Prof. Platt and Adeline, they were all this time getting very close together. Not that the Professor was in love with her. Oh!

no. He was too experienced a hand to allow such feelings to take possession of him, but he always had an eye to the main chance, and Mr. Melton was well off, and Richland is a pleasant place, and all things come to an end, even tramping over the country, and it might sometime become desirable to settle somewhere; and here was a pretty girl willing to listen to him, and no harm could come from paying her special attentions, thus making the way easy for a greater advance if it should prove desirable to proceed further in that direction.

Prof. Platt was not a common tramp. He had many qualities which would have made him succeed in more respectable walks of life, if the slight mixture of Indian blood had not made him restless of regular pursuits and crafty in disposition. But he was an epicure in his way, and could appreciate a good thing when he found it, and enjoy the goods the gods placed before him as well as any man. He was not a gentleman in the best meaning of the term, but he was a very good imitation of one, and found no pleasure in the company of persons ill bred or of coarse disposition. So the evident admiration that he had awakened in Adeline's breast had a

pleasant flavor for him, and careless of the influence it might have on her future happiness, he encouraged her flame by all the arts in his possession, and drank in the pleasure he found in her society with a feeling that his time was well employed, and that whatever might be his future intentions, it was good policy for him to court her during the time of his stay.

The stream which flows through the valley has fall enough to furnish power for small industries, and dams have been erected at suitable places, making ponds often of large extent, which were taken advantage of by the young people for boating in summer, as well as for skating ground when frozen over.

Near Mr. Melton's house the big road made a sharp bend, and crossed the stream on an old fashioned bridge, turning back soon after to follow the other side of the valley. Just above the bridge a dam had been erected, not very high, for the banks of the stream would not retain much backwater, but the stream was wide at that place, and sluggish, so that the water flowed back nearly half a mile, and with its fringe of green meadows, and dotted over with numerous small islands, the pond thus formed furnished a delightful

place for lovers, where they could float leisurely along, and feel themselves carefully hid from the eyes of the world. Two pretty pleasure boats had been placed upon its waters, and almost every fine afternoon Prof. Platt would propose to the girls to take a ride with him.

Lizzie would sometimes accompany Adeline, both because she enjoyed the rides, and especially the singing in which, when she was along, they usually indulged, but principally because she felt dubious of the wisdom of her sister being left so much alone with the Professor. With her experience as a warning, it made her mistrustful, and she felt like watching over her. She had cautioned Adeline, but the advice had not been well received, and as she was not at that time willing to confide her fears to her sister, she felt that it was of no use to say any more, and all that she could do was to keep an eye upon her.

However she really had no cause for fear, for while it was true that neither Prof. Platt nor Adeline had a character to be entirely trusted, they had an amount of worldly wisdom that neither Charles nor herself had possessed. Prof. Platt had, in ante-bellum times, found that the betrayal of young girls is

sometimes a dangerous pastime which had compelled him to leave home and had started him on his tramps, and Adeline, through her love of gossip, and intimacy with girls more experienced than herself, had gained much necessary knowledge that foolish mothers, in this age of false prudery, allow their daughters either to do without, or to receive from what often proves very undesirable associations. Lizzie had been prevented by her sedate ways and self-reliant character from sufficient familiar associations with such persons as could have given her the needed information, and through sheer ignorance had run risks that her light-headed sister knew perfectly well how to avoid.

So really Adeline was running no great danger, and found Prof. Platt a charming companion, and made the most of her present enjoyments. For out-of-door pleasures in the fall do not last very late in the northern states, and soon ice and snow would come in possession. However the autumn of that year was remarkably fine, and the Indian summer lingered on as if loth to surrender the land to the rigors of winter. But finally the cider having been all pressed, the potatoes dug, the corn garnered in the capacious barns,

the balmy autumn days came to an end, and the Winter King extended his scepter all over the land.

With the beginning of winter the singing school ended, but a scheme had been brewing which would give Prof. Platt an excuse to remain, and also prolong the opportunities of the young people to meet and enjoy each other's society. In that part of the country, yet at that time strongly imbued with puritanical influences, pleasure entertainments for the young were of rare occurrence, and cards and dancing parties were strictly forbidden as contrary to morality, so that young people of both sexes had no opportunity to meet except at gatherings held under the auspices of the church. On that account, an effort made by Prof. Platt to give a secular concert with the help of his school, had not met with much encouragement until it was suggested to connect it with the Sunday School Christmas entertainment.

The attendance at the Sunday School of the Richland Methodist church was large, and Prof. Platt had at once connected himself with it, and offered his services as a teacher. He had proved a faithful worker, and now led the singing with Adeline, displacing for

the time Mr. Talbot, the superintendent, who could but submit to the logic of events, and in his capacity of married man could make no effort to attract Adeline's attention.

It was the custom of the school at every Christmas to give an entertainment of some kind, and to charge a small entrance fee, to be used to replenish the stock of the Sunday School library. The most popular of late had been a Christmas tree, on which parents and friends were allowed to hang presents for distribution among the children. Gradually the exercises of an opening prayer by the superintendent, and an address by the preacher, intermingled with one or two songs by the school, had given place to dialogues, recitations and secular songs. Not that the opening prayer and address were omitted, but their length was sensibly curtailed, and instead of being the piece de resistance of the evening, they became the entree and hors d'oeuvre of the intellectual feast.

These innovations were of course sturdily opposed by the older members of the church, but their influence was on the wane, and strengthened by the presence of Prof. Platt, the young people decided to take entirely into their hands the management of this festival.

Many were the meetings held by the executive committee, and many the rehearsals needed to prepare for the great occasion. Sometimes at the church, sometimes at private houses, the singers met to practice for the concert which was to be a prominent feature of the evening entertainment, and for what was a greater innovation still a play which had been decided upon. A very mild play, and a very moral one, it is true, but a real play with actors, and to be acted in church, and as part of the festivities held in grateful remembrance of the birth of Christ. No wonder if many a good soul looked upon it with great doubt as to its propriety, and exchanged doleful condolences on the irreligious tendencies of the present generation.

Two days before Christmas, William Horner hitched his horses to his sleigh and with Prof. Platt and some of the larger boys of the school, ransacked the woods until they found two suitable trees. The choice was not as easy as it would seem. They must be grown in the open so as to spread evenly on all sides, with their limbs well down the body of the tree. They must be just the right height to reach about two-thirds of the way to the ceiling, and they must be as nearly alike as

possible so as to look well when opposite each other. Then when after much seeking and after much discussion the trees were found and brought down, the sleigh returned for a load of hemlock boughs to be used in decorating the building.

These preliminaries finished, a bevy of boys and girls turned the church into a scene of bustling activity. While the younger ones tore off the small limbs and brought them to the older workers, these, tying long pieces of twine from door knobs to backs of seats or any other places where they could be kept stretched, would cover them with the evergreen, and hold it in place by winding strings around it, thus making evergreen ropes to be used wherever needed. Others made stars, or covered hoops, all under the direction of Prof. Platt who had taken the lead by general consent.

When the work was all done, a large platform, carpeted and decorated had been constructed in front of the pulpit and over the railing of the altar. The trees stood one on each side, a little back so as to not obstruct the sight. The pillars which supported the galleries were entwined with evergreens which also hung in graceful festoons all around the

walls. The hoops encircled the lamps, and the stars decorated the gallery pannels, and the look of the inside of the church was exceedingly cheerful and attractive to the eye.

The day had been one of real enjoyment for all the persons engaged, and merry words and laughing repartee had held full sway. All had worked faithfully, but Prof. Platt and William Horner had borne the brunt of the fray, one in directing, and the other in executing wherever strength was needed.

The next day, soon after dinner the work of decorating the trees began. From hill and dale came sleighs with the presents, which carefully assorted as to color and shape, were judiciously hung as ornaments, and intermixed with golden oranges and bright red apples made a sight well calculated to delight the heart of the children. When the shades of night fell, so much had been brought that all could not find a place on the trees, and the larger presents had to be laid on the floor, and as no room could be found for the Christmas candles, lamps with reflectors had to be substituted.

At last the final touch was given, and the tired workers had a chance to retire to their different homes to rest and get ready for the

festivities of the evening. Great expectations had been awakened among the inhabitants and the fame of the preparations had gone far and near, so that at night every seat was occupied and standing room even was in great demand. Nor were the expectations doomed to disappointment. The stage, although small, had a very attractive appearance, flanked on each side by the graceful trees so richly decorated with such a diversity of presents.

And on that bright stage was given an entertainment such as the walls of the church had never witnessed. Solos, duets, choruses, followed each other, intermingled with acted dialogues, plays and recitations. Prof. Platt was in his element, and had succeeded in infusing a spirit in his scholars which was felt by the audience, and contributed greatly to the success of the occasion.

And when the last song had been heard, and the last piece recited, and the Sunday School teachers were all called upon the stage to help distribute the many gifts among the children, then merriment knew no bounds and happiness reigned supreme.

Everybody was pleased, and everybody was tired, and finally when the last straggler had left, and the last light extinguished, many a

weary head rested upon its pillow, glad of the pleasure which had been given, but thankful that Christmas with its festivities and work comes only once a year.

CHAPTER VI.

WINTER SPORTS AND ADVENTURES.

That winter was long remembered by the inhabitants of Richland. The fall was dry and warm, and no rain having fallen since August, the streams and wells got exceedingly low. Nor was there any very cold weather felt until after New Year. Then came light falls of snow and freezing weather, followed later on by such heavy storms that great depths of snow covered all the country as a thick mantle, and drifted so heavily as to make communications difficult away from the main travelled roads.

Early in January, one bright afternoon, Prof. Platt and Adeline had just stepped out of the house to go and skate on the pond, which was nicely frozen over and smooth as a sheet of glass, when as they reached the road and

could see from the gate the long stretch which led to the village, Adeline spied two familiar forms coming in their direction.

"Look here, Professor," she exclaimed, "we will have to give up our skating. If I am not mistaken here come two girls to visit us this afternoon."

"That's Mary Tatom, sure enough," said the Professor after taking a long look, "and Lu Brandon. Well they are jolly girls and pleasant enough society. But we do not know that they are coming to see you, and we may as well go on the pond. If we are the ones they want to visit, they will find us, never you fear."

"Let's go then," acceded Adeline, nothing loth. She liked to skate, and especially to have the Professor wait upon her. He was such an adept in tying on her skates, and always had a neat compliment for her. So on they went, and when the girls reached the place they were in full swing, disporting themselves over the frozen waters.

"Nice people you are," called out Mary Tatom from the bridge, from which they had full sight of the lower end of the pond, "to run away when you see us coming. Are you afraid, Adeline, that we'll take your beau from you?"

"Why, Mary, is that you?" exclaimed Adeline in well feigned astonishment. "We did see you two girls coming, but couldn't tell who you were, or if it was any one coming to see us. Come on the ice and have some fun."

"No, thank you," said Lu. "We have no skates, and would just freeze looking at you."

Here the Professor interposed, and pulling off his hat, and with many fine words, assured the girls that if they would come he would find some way to make them participate in their amusements. So the girls, who really asked no better, soon joined them and for a time were pulled around by the Professor and Adeline, each giving them a hand. But if it was fun, it was hard work also, and they were ready to listen to Farmer Melton's suggestion, when passing on the bridge, he called out:

"Hey! young folks! Why don't you try fishing? You cannot find a better day. Just wait a minute and I'll bring the gigs and we'll try our luck."

Fishing in winter is not done with a hook and line. Instead, a hole is cut in the ice, and the fish carefully driven toward it. Attracted by the light the fish rise near the surface, and are speared with a gig and pulled out of the water.

The idea pleased the young people, who were ready for anything that would keep them out of doors, and soon a couple of holes were cut at the lower end of the pond, and with Farmer Melton at one and Lu Brandon at the other, kneeling gig in hand, watching for any unlucky fish that should come within their reach, the others scattered toward the head of the pond, and forming themselves into a semi-circle, commenced to stamp the ice to drive the fish in the desired direction. But probably the skating and the noise they had made had scared the fish higher up the stream and that first attempt had no results.

"Go up higher!" said Farmer Melton. "Go up higher! near the islands."

Now it happened that higher up the current was strong enough to prevent the ice from forming so thickly, so the girls demurred, saying they did not want to run the danger of breaking through. But the Professor, probably less experienced, made light of their fears, and when Mary, who was next to him, declined to go any further, he laughed at her declaring it was on account of her being so plump that she was afraid the ice would not support her.

"No wonder you dare go no further," he said

in a bantering tone. "I would also be afraid if I weighed as much as you do. But I'll show you that for a man of my light build there is no danger."

"If you walked on your head, you needn't be afraid," retorted Mary who did not like to have fun made of her stout figure. "It is empty enough to be light, I am sure; but those big feet of your's will certainly pull you in if you are not careful."

"No danger, Miss Mary, if I can only keep far enough from you," continued the Professor who had kept on walking regardless of some ominous sounds. "Keep more to the right, Miss Mary, don't you hear how you are cracking the ice 'way up in this direction?"

By that time Farmer Melton was getting impatient. "You have gone far enough," he called out. "Turn round and drive the fish down."

At the word of command, Prof. Platt turned, and forgetful of his precarious position, stamped on the ice, which gave way suddenly under him and let him down into the water. The ice was really so thin, and it was so quickly done, that before he realized what had happened, he found himself standing in a hole in the ice, with his feet resting on the bottom of the pond.

And a more foolish looking man was seldom seen, as he stood gasping for breath at the shock of his sudden bath, and as with his head and shoulders sticking above the ice, he looked in a bewildered way at the girls who could not help but laugh at his comical situation.

"Ha! Ha! Professor," exclaimed Mary. "Where are you going? I told you those big feet would yet pull you through. Any fish down there? Ha! Ha! Professor, you do look funny." And she laughed as if she took the whole performance as part of the programme promised by Prof. Platt for their amusement.

There was no danger, but it was an unpleasant position, for such a bath in winter is not calculated to give agreeable sensations. It took Prof. Platt a little time before he could get out of the water. The ice would not bear him and would break whenever he tried to rest his weight upon it, and the girls could give him no help, and stood at a safe distance, alternately cheering him and chafing him in his fruitless attempts. But Farmer Melton soon brought a plank which he slid on the ice till it got in reach of the Professor, and walking carefully upon it, pulled him out without great difficulty.

All that time Prof. Platt had said not a word, and as soon as he got out of the water, he made a bee line for the house, looking neither to the right nor to the left, and with his wet clothes clinging to his spare form and the water dripping at every step, he reminded one of a wet rooster strutting in the barnyard during a heavy summer shower.

Adeline followed him hurriedly, anxious to minister to him, and the two girls went with her, for they knew there would be no more fishing that day. Mary felt a little remorseful at laughing so immoderately at the Professor's expense, but she felt that he deserved it for having made fun of her; and probably he came to the same conclusion, for when thoroughly warmed and clad in dry garments, he seemed to take his adventure in good part, and received in the right spirit the excuses that Mary offered for her conduct.

"It's all right now, Miss Mary," he said, "although it was not very pleasant while I was in the water. You had the laugh on me then, and I don't know but what I deserved it. But some day I may get even with you, and if I can I will, and don't you forget it."

But heavy falls of snow put an end to all such pleasures soon after. The lack of rain

in the fall was more than compensated by the amount of snow which accumulated on the ground in the latter part of winter, making communications difficult and keeping the people a great deal in-doors.

Farmer Melton had some business to attend to in a valley which extended behind the hill on which his farm was situated, and had been deterred for some time from going to see the parties on account of the bad weather. It was not very far across the intervening farms, but while on his side many persons lived on the way and a road had been broken to the top, there was only one house on that part of the hill turned toward the other valley, and he was afraid to undertake to cross in his sleigh. He could go by the main road by following it for about four miles, where a good road across a low gap would take him to the other valley, but it was an eight miles trip and it seemed a little hard to have to travel sixteen miles to go and see a man who lived so near as to be looked upon in summer as being one of his neighbors.

However after putting it off several times, he decided to go round, hoping to be able to come back the short way, and on a bright afternoon in February he hitched Bob to the

cutter and started on his journey. He did not take Fanny that time for she was too old and slow for such a long trip. Bob was a younger horse, with plenty of fire and staying power, and who could be depended upon to keep his wits about him should he happen to get in deep snow.

The day was clear and cool, and the sun shone brightly, so that the long ride was not unpleasant, but the days are short in winter in these regions, and unluckily for Farmer Melton he could not find Mr. Dixon at once, so that the sun was getting low when his business having been satisfactorily transacted, he entered his cutter to return to his home.

"How is it, Mr. Dixon?" he asked that gentleman. "Can I get over the hill, or is the snow too much drifted?"

"I really cannot tell you," was the answer. "I know the drifts are dreadful, and yet you can get across if you can find the way. Do you see that house?" showing him one on the top of the hill. "There is a well beaten track from there to Richland, that I know, but can you get there is more than I can tell. Yet Jim Markam came down from there yesterday, but he knows every inch of the way and how to avoid the places where it is badly drifted."

"That's true," said Mr. Melton, 'and I am sure there are places where the drifts must be more than ten feet deep. If I should run into one of them I never could get Bob or the sleigh out without help. Yet it looks as if I ought to be able to reach that house, and it is too bad to have to go back such a long way."

"Yes it is," assented Mr. Dixon, "and with a good safe horse it looks as if it could be done on such a nice clear day."

"I do hate to go round," continued Mr. Melton, who like many a man of indolent character, was often ready to run unnecessary risks through pure laziness. "What others have done Bob and I can do. I'll risk it anyhow."

"Well," said Mr. Dixon, "if you are determined to try it I think you'll pull through. You go to that house," showing him one half way up the hill. "You'll have no trouble to get to it, and from there you will probably see enough of the tracks Jim made yesterday to help you find your way."

"Come Bob!" said Mr. Melton, "We are going home. You must do your best and be sure to pull us through."

Bob slightly turned his head and looking at him from the corner of his eye, seemed to

understand what his master was saying. He had been pawing the ground while the gentlemen were talking, and of his own accord turned in the road that led the short way. But in winter, in these hills the roads cannot be long followed; the snow drifts in all the lanes and fills all the hollows, and a track has to be made which winds in and out in most peculiar fashion. Up to the first house a good track was broken and Farmer Melton had no trouble to find his way. From the house the track led toward the barn, where the wind had a fair sweep, and had accumulated a bank at least fifteen feet high.

"Heigho!" said Farmer Melton to himself, "that's a big one sure. If that's the kind they keep about here, and I fall in one of them, I'll never get out." But as he turned the corner of the barn in a place that the wind had swept bare of snow, he could see the other house not more than five hundred yards distant, and he knew that if he could reach it he would have a good track from there to Richland.

Between him and his goal lay a wide expanse of snow, all tracks obliterated by the wind, and no one around the outbuildings to give him directions, but seeing tufts of dry

grass peeping here and there, he concluded it was high land and that he would meet with no difficulty. All went well for one hundred yards or more, then the depth of snow increased, but Mr. Melton noticed with satisfaction that Bob did not seem to go down very deep. The snow had packed sufficiently to sustain him if he travelled quickly over it, but he knew that should he stop it would not hold him up very long, and there was no telling how deep he might sink. They were like a man on thin ice, which will hold him up long enough to enable him to glide over it.

Then a bright idea struck Mr. Melton, that came near having results disastrous to him. If he was to get out and walk behind the cutter the weight would be greatly reduced, and it would greatly increase the chances of Bob passing over safely. Without thinking any further, and without stopping the horse, Mr. Melton fastened the lines to the front board, climbed on the seat and slipping behind on the snow, and firmly grasping the back of the seat, tried to follow walking.

But he had not thought of all the extra clothing with which he was encumbered. A heavy overcoat tightly buttoned up to his chin, a pair of fur gloves, and a woolen com-

forter tied over his ears, is hardly the accoutrement for a heavy man to walk in deep snow. And he quickly found that it was not walking, but running, that he would have to do, for Bob, quick to realize the treacherous nature of the path he was treading, accelerated his steps till his quick walk was changed into a slow trot.

Mr. Melton had not gone twenty yards till he recognized the fix he was in. He could not stop his horse without the risk of his floundering, how deep he could not tell, but there might be ten feet of snow under them. He could not get back in the sleigh, for he was too much exhausted, and he could not let go, for the snow would not hold him up any length of time. So he held on like grim death, panting, puffing, sweating, and probably inwardly swearing at the awkward fix he had placed himself in, and anxiously looking for a sign of high land on which he would feel safe to stop. But they were crossing a swale, and it was only when they had almost reached the house they were aiming for that he dared to call: "Ho! Bob. Ho!"

The intelligent animal stopped at the word of command, and Mr. Melton entirely exhausted could only throw himself across the seat

of the cutter, where he lay several minutes with the breath all out of him.

However, no harm had been done; they had got across safely, and from there they met with no further difficulty, but he did not feel much like bragging about his adventure, and when he finally told it, he remarked:

"I thought I knew enough to go in when it rains, but it seems a man is never too old to learn. You may be sure that another time I'll remember that often the longest way around is the quickest way home. Why! if Bob had sunk in that drift, there's no telling if either of us would have ever got out."

CHAPTER VII.

THE LETTER.

During that winter, the presence of Prof. Platt at Richland furnished that little place with a ripple of mild excitement, such as is dear to the gossips of these little towns, where the echoes of the busy world are only dimly heard, and the only material for conversation is furnished by the inhabitants themselves.

It came about through a letter received by the postmaster of the place, and for a while threatened the reputation of the Professor, and might have hastened his exit from that section of the country.

In those inland towns, the post office is often located in one of the stores, and helps it to divide with the hotel bar-room the distinction of being the resort of the loafers of the locality. Not but what there is quite a difference between the loafers at the hotel and those at the store.

The loafers at the hotel are rather a disreputable set. Some are dissipated characters, who spend the best part of their earnings for drink, and when out of money loaf around the bar in the hope of a drink from some crony better supplied with funds. Others are idle young men who have inherited unhealthy tendencies, and are taking the first steps in a carreer that will end in ruin and poverty. Backwood farmers are also found there, who relieve the tediousness of their existence by periodical visits to the country tavern, mixing with politicians who find in those surroundings the proper material for the exercise of the baneful influence which makes them a power in their party; the whole home element

seasoned by a class of commercial travellers who are never so happy as when surrounded by an appreciative audience for stories seldom fit for decent ears.

In a word, the bar-room is a place of gathering for the worst elements in the community, and the hotel itself is only kept respectable by the character of the host and his family, for strange as it may appear, they are usually good. honest people, who have a special care for their own reputation. In fact, the host must be a man of good character, for otherwise he could not keep in check the unruly elements that congregate at his house, and his tavern would soon degenerate in a public nuisance and his license be taken away from him.

But the store is the place for the respectable loafers. First the preacher, if he is a man of genial disposition who loves to meet his parishioners, for he is sure to find some of them every afternoon and evening, discussing the weather, the crops or the politics of the day. Not only the preacher, but other church dignitaries are fond of spending an hour in idle gossip, and on rainy days, when work is slack, the store is the chief center of attraction for

the hard working farmers who constitute the majority of the population of the Township.

But in Richland, the usual crowd which gathers at the store was increased by the opening of the daily mail, which took place every evening after supper time. In those days, the nearest railroad station was at Nettleburgh fifteen miles distant, and a stage, starting from a town above Richland, went down every morning, coming back at night with the only mail that reached that region each day. Thus it had come to pass that soon after supper, all those families that lived within easy reach would send one of their numbers to see if any papers or letters had come, and a fair sized crowd would always gather at the store when the mail was distributed, and many would spend an hour or two in discussion before returning to their homes.

Mr. Ross, the storekeeper, was a man past fifty, of more intelligence and better informed than the average of his customers. He went often to New York to replenish his stock, and thus mixed more with the outside world. Besides, having kept a store all his life, and in different places, he had acquired much experience of human nature, and was possessed of more than average judgment.

Sometime after the events described in the last chapter, Mr. Ross found in the mail bag a letter addressed to the Postmaster at Richland. He set it aside and when the throng had somewhat thinned, and he was at leisure to look at his own mail, he opened it with some curiosity which was not lessened when he mastered its contents.

The letter which was neither dated nor headed, read thus:

Dear Sir,

I write to you in great trouble, hoping that you will help me to find a man who has left me with two little children without any means of support. I see by an account in a newspaper that fell in my hands by accident, that a man calling himself Professor Platt is teaching music in your town. I have good reason to believe that he is no other than my husband who deserted me some years ago, and from whom I have not heard since.

Please show this letter to him, and try to persuade him to come back to his family, and I can assure him all will be forgiven.

I do not sign my name to this letter because if he will not come back willingly I do not want to force him to it, and if he wants to repair the injury he has done to his family,

he knows well enough who writes this letter and where to find us.

Please tell him his children are both well, and that little Jimmie grows every day more like his father.

An injured but forgiving wife.

Had Mr. Ross seen less of the world, he would have given full credence to the contents of this letter, for he did not like Prof. Platt, and had often mistrusted the truth of his statements, or the honesty of his intentions. But he had lived long enough to know that but little weight must be given to an anonymous letter, and he concluded to take some time for reflection and consultation.

As it happened, Mr. Jennings, the preacher of the Methodist church, was then in the store, and he beckoned to him, and when they were snugly ensconced behind the counter, and out of earshot of the persons yet in the store, he told him what he had received and gave him the letter to read.

Mr. Jennings read it carefully twice, turned it, looked at the postmark which happened to be Nettleburgh, and said:

"A serious matter, Mr. Ross, and one which requires consideration. Do you believe there is any truth in this accusation?"

"Really I cannot say what I believe about it," answered the storekeeper. "From what I have seen of the man I think it quite probable that he has left a family somewhere behind him, yet this letter looks to me like a pure fabrication."

"Yes, the letter does not inspire me with much confidence," rejoined the preacher. 'It has no date or signature, and was evidently mailed at Nettleburgh. And yet I do not believe you would be justified in ignoring it altogether. I hear that Prof. Platt is quite attentive to Mr. Melton's youngest daughter, and if he should marry her and this prove true, you would feel that you had failed of your duty in the matter."

"That is very true," said Mr. Ross, "and yet I hardly know what to do. This letter gives no hint as to the writer, or how we can get more information, still I feel that I must do something. Probably the best that can be done is to show it to Prof. Platt, and decide our line of action after we hear his explanation."

"I think you are right," agreed the preacher. "But it is too late to do anything to-night, and any way we had better wait until we have had time to think the matter over."

"Well, Mr. Jennings," concluded Mr. Ross,

"remember that if I decide to show it to Prof. Platt, I shall want you to be present at the interview. I think he is a slippery fellow, and it will take us both to ferret out the truth."

"All right, Mr. Ross, I will do what I can to help find out if the man is married or not."

Further reflection and discussion confirmed these two gentlemen of the wisdom of their decision, and Prof. Platt was invited to a private conference in the parlor of the parsonage. He was not informed of the object of the interview, and seemed quite flustrated when Mr. Ross pulled out the letter and said:

"Professor, we have received a letter about you, and think it best that you should know of its contents before they are made public, for they are of a somewhat damaging nature, and probably you may be able to explain them to our satisfaction."

What revelation about his past life the Professor expected to be made, his interlocutors had no means of knowing, but he was evidently ill at ease, and flushed and paled by turns. But as soon as Mr. Ross commenced to read, his expression changed, his face recovered its natural color, and he seemed considerably relieved from his fears, and he quickly launched in a fierce denial of the accusation.

"This letter is false! gentlemen," he said. "There is not a word of truth in it. I have no wife, no family. Some enemy has done that to hurt me in the estimation of the people of Richland."

"We are glad to hear you say so, Prof. Platt," remarked Mr. Jennings, but we thought that under the circumstances, if you are innocent, you would have no objections in giving us some reference to persons who have known you before you came here. Besides if the letter is false you will have no trouble to prove it."

At the mention of reference, Prof. Platt's face fell. It was evident that he did not relish the idea of an investigation into his past life, but he put a bold front on the matter.

"Certainly," he said. "I have been in the army these last four years, and I can give you the name and address of my officers, who will testify to my good character, and which will show that I have no family to desert."

Then after a moment of silence:

"Please let me see that letter. I may know who is the writer after all."

Mr. Ross handed him the letter which the Professor looked over carefully.

"I think I know who has written it," he

said at last, "and I know also why it has been written. I spent last summer at Bradley, on the other side of Nettleburgh, and there I became acquainted with a young widow and — well she expected me to marry her and I did not care to, and when I left she was very angry and said she would be revenged. And that is her revenge, but it is rather clumsy, and will be easily exposed."

Mr. Ross and Jennings looked at each other. The explanation was a plausible one, and as Prof. Platt had acceded to their desire for references, they must wait for answers; and yet Mr. Ross was hardly satisfied.

"Prof. Platt," he said, "you understand that we have no right to look into your past life, and that it is no concern of ours whether you are a married man or not. But you know also that as long as you remain in this neighborhood it is for your interest that there should be no mystery about your past. What you say about the young widow is probably true, and you can easily find out whether she sent the letter or not, but as to the references you propose to give us, they hardly go back far enough, for you were no longer a young man when you went in the army, and could have been a married man then, and the person you

refer us to may have known nothing about it. For your own sake, we would advise you to refer us to some persons who have known you before the war."

"You are right." answered the Professor, "and I will see to it that you get the names of some persons that knew me when I was a young man."

There was little more to be said, and if the truth must be told, there was little more done. It was evident to both gentlemen that Prof. Platt did not care to have his early life investigated, and they were not surprised to receive no answer to the letters they sent to such persons as they had been referred to as able to give information upon his younger days. As to the story of the wife and children, if it could not be proven absolutely that the widow had written the letter, yet the Professor came so near to it as to show that the story that he had deserted his family rested upon a very slim foundation.

Of that fact Prof. Platt made all the capital possible. The receipt of the letter had leaked out as such things always do, and the Professor insisted upon making a public explanation one evening after prayer meeting, when he read the letter aloud and in flowery

language expostulated upon the wickedness of those who would rob him of his good name, the only thing of value, he said, left in his possession. On that occasion he showed so conclusively the falsehood of the accusation, and pictured himself so vividly as the innocent victim of the wiles of the widow, that he carried the audience with him and regained his place in the good graces of the women of the congregation, who had at first been inclined to sympathize with the wife and children, especially with "poor Jimmy, who looked so much like his pa." As for Adeline, the whole incident only strengthened the feelings she had for the Professor, as he made her his confidante, and poured into her ear the story of the persecutions of that wicked woman, who wanted to marry him against his will.

For a time the excitement ran high, and Richland was very much worked over the question whether Prof. Platt was married or single, but public opinion settled itself into a belief of his singleness, and that there was nothing wrong or dishonorable in his attentions to the unmarried women of the community.

But Mr. Ross, Mr. Jennings, and some of the older heads did not feel very sure of the

fact, but they were not called upon to further investigate, nor did they have enough personal interest to make thorough inquiries as to what was his real name and where he had spent his youth.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BREAKING UP.

In March, instead of the usual gentle rains and warm winds which herald the advent of spring, several heavy falls of snow came in succession, until the inhabitants became seriously uneasy about the floods which were sure to follow the coming of warm weather. No such amount of snow had laid on the ground for a number of years, and the lateness of the season increased the danger of a quick thaw, which would break up the ice and sweep it down stream before it would have time to soften.

The width of the valley prevented the formation of these ice gorges which are so destructive in other parts of the country, but a quick flood would endanger the safety of the

many bridges on the main stream. Those had all been built high enough to be safe from the raging torrent, but if some large block of solid ice should become wedged between the piers, and thus prevent the free passage of the smaller pieces, they would soon accumulate and form a complete dam, rising higher and higher as the pressure increased, until the apron being reached it would be swept away by the tremendous pressure exerted behind it.

Not until nearly the first of April did the weather moderate, or was there any sign of a thaw. Then the air became warmer, the snow softened, and pools of water commenced to appear all over the fields, and from these pools small rivulets made their way to the main stream, which in a few days rose several feet. Yet to the great satisfaction of the inhabitants no rain fell to add its water to the abundant supply furnished by the melting snow.

During that time all kinds of business were suspended. The sleighing was spoiled, and the beaten track in the road had become a bed of slush and mud, as difficult to travel with wheels as with runners. No one dared to leave home to go any distance, not know-

ing if communications would not be cut off before he could return, and the farmers would meet in little knots at the exposed points, watching the rising waters, commenting upon coming contingencies, and listening to the well worn tales of the oldest inhabitants, about past disastrous floods. But even they had to acknowledge that within the memory of man there had not been such an accumulation of snow in the valley, or so much danger of destructive floods, for the hill sides had been extensively cleared, and the snow would melt much faster than when they were still covered with forests.

However the bridges were higher, the mill dams stronger, and it was hoped that if the breaking up of the ice should take place during the day, so that active measures could be taken, a great deal of the damage could be averted.

A day or two after the softening of the atmosphere, one Saturday afternoon, Farmer Melton walked down to the bridge accompanied by Lizzie, to take a look at the situation. The stream had risen several feet, and was rushing past like a mountain torrent, and yet no sensible diminution of the vast expanse of snow could be noticed, nor did the ice on

the pond show any sign of breaking up. Arrived at the bridge, they stopped and leaning on the parapet, stood gazing at the foaming waters. Farmer Melton shook his head and a dubious expression stole over his face.

"Lizzie," he said, "we have been lucky so far, and these warm days and cool nights are just the thing for us. But I do not exactly see how so much snow and ice are to pass under this bridge without carrying it off."

"Well father," answered Lizzie, "we must hope for the best, you know; but won't it be a grand sight when all that ice goes!"

"Yes, yes, grand sight enough for you girls, but it won't look so grand to us if it carries off all the bridges and dams. But it is no use to try to cross a river until we get to it, and I guess we needn't think of rebuilding the bridges until they have been taken away. I do not see that anything can be done at present, but I shall be surprised if this bridge is here to-morrow night."

The next morning, soon after daylight, Farmer Melton was wakened by a neighbor, who hastily informed him that one of the spans of the bridge was completely blocked by an immense piece of ice, which must be dislodged

before the water rose any higher, or the bridge would surely be carried away.

Hastening down to the stream, the farmer found that something altogether unexpected had happened. On account of the dryness of the fall the water of the creek had become exceedingly low, and had remained so all winter, and the dam being perfectly tight, when the gates were shut the bed of the stream was entirely dry. But every day, usually in the afternoon, the miller would empty his pond in utilizing the water, and as he shut his gate at night, a thin film of water would for a while cover the bed of gravel, and freeze adhering to the bottom.

As day after day this operation was repeated, this thin film grew in size, till a mass of ice was formed of several feet in thickness and covering a considerable extent. But that ice, unlike that on other parts of the stream, instead of floating on the water adhered to the bottom, and the rising waters had until then passed over it. In the night the stream had risen to such a height that the buoyancy of the ice had torn it from its moorings and it had risen to the top.

The cake which had thus formed, and was now floating on the surface, was so large as

to entirely block the space between two of the stone piers, and the water had sufficiently risen so that it almost touched the floor of the bridge. If allowed to remain, it would, as soon as the ice on the dam broke, prevent its passage, and the bridge would undoubtedly be swept away.

Many men had already gathered on the spot, and were discussing the best method to accomplish the work. Axes were sent for, and efforts were made to break up the cake in several parts, but it resisted all attempts. It was not a common ice cake which had thus arisen out of the deep, but a young iceberg, and the few inches it showed above the water were but a small indication of the many feet which were hidden below.

William Horner was among the workers, and with three or four others had labored faithfully to break up the enormous floe, but when he realized the impossibility of their accomplishing the task, he set his mind to devise some other way to get rid of it.

"Boys," he said, "it is of no use for us to work in this way. This is a bigger piece of ice than any of us has ever seen before, and we are not going to break it up however hard we may try. But I will tell you what

we can do. If all of you here," turning to the men still on the bank, "will come and help us, I think we can chip it off in small pieces, and finally get it small enough to pass between the piers."

The suggestion seemed a good one, and soon every man who could procure an axe had jumped on the ice and was busy chipping it away. The piece was so large that the added weight of the men did not sink it appreciably, and they found plenty of room around the edges to work without being in each other's way. At first their combined efforts did not seem to have any perceptible results, but little by little the size of the mass was reduced, and it was found that as the parts exposed were chipped off, the floe rose out of the water, and new portions made their appearance on which they could work. At the end of half an hour the circumference had sensibly diminished, and some of the men had to return to land.

Thus encouraged by their success, and not knowing how soon the ice on the dam might give way, the workers persevered until only three men found room to work, and the question of their safety had to be considered.

The stream at that place, confined by high

walls erected for the protection of the mill property, was then a furious torrent, rushing by with tremendous velocity, and the life of none but the most expert swimmer would have been safe in its raging waters. It was well enough to save the bridge if possible, but it certainly would not do to endanger precious lives in the attempt; and yet, whenever the ice floe would have been cut enough to pass between the piers, it would go off with a rush and sweep away any one who might be upon it and precipitate them in the water.

Prof. Platt had been among the most efficient workers, for he was not deficient in courage, and a fight with the elements had an attraction for his adventurous character, and with William Horner remained on the ice to the last.

Soon the danger became so great that Mr. Melton insisted that work should be suspended, and some precautionary measure should be used to take off the last man that should remain at work. According to his directions, a long heavy plank was procured and one of its ends extended over the ice, while the end on the bank was weighted by many of the spectators. On that plank Prof. Platt insisted that Horner should stand, while he would stay

and cut away the ice until it should begin to float away, then Horner would seize him and lift him out of danger. He was the lightest, he said, and it would be no trouble for Horner to hold him in safety.

His arguments were sound, and he was left alone on the ice while Horner braced himself to seize him at the right moment. It was an exciting time. The women of the neighborhood had heard of the danger, and had flocked down to the creek to see what was going on. Adeline was there, and not daring to protest against the danger Prof. Platt was running, she stood with blanched cheeks, watching all his motions as he cut away at the frail support which alone stood between him and the swift current. As for Horner, he stood firm and expectant, knowing well that should he lose his balance at the critical moment, they would both be precipitated in the water.

Cautiously, but with firm strokes, the Professor hacked away at the points where the pressure seemed the greatest. Two or three times, as the cake seemed ready to start, he moved toward the place of safety, but they were false alarms. Not all of them, however, for he had been at work but a few minutes

when a decisive stroke at the critical spot sent the whole mass whirling between the piers so suddenly as to give him barely time to spring toward Horner, who caught him by the arms and with a mighty effort turned bodily around, and almost threw him on the bank, while the rushing waters filled the place where he had stood.

The thing was so quickly done, and the danger so much greater than what any of them had anticipated, that no sound was heard except a long drawn sigh of relief from the spectators, and no one thought of looking to see the huge mass of ice plunge headlong in the turbid current.

Congratulations were poured in upon the two men who had shown all the nerve and coolness of trained veterans. Lizzie was there also, and though she said nothing, and her cheeks had not lost their color, nor her pulse unduly quickened, yet both men certainly rose in her estimation, and her liking for Horner was increased by that feeling of respect that all women have for the men who display courage and determination.

There was very little attendance at the church that morning, and most of the choir members were absent. The morning was nearly

spent before the people dispersed to their homes, and the first meal of the day was enjoyed in a quiet fashion, for so long as the bridge was in danger the men had no thought of leaving to eat the food that the women had indeed prepared, but had been left to cool while they flocked to see how the men were getting on.

Instead of going to church, the people spent most of the day on the bridge, watching the rising tide and the ice on the pond. The day was beautiful, warm, and with a bright sun shining which must surely soften the ice and weaken its power of resistance to the ever-increasing torrent. Soon after dinner small cakes commenced to make their appearance, showing that the ice was giving way higher up the stream, and as they piled upon the smooth surface of the pond, it broke into large pieces which heaved and fell as they were tossed about by the mighty rush of the waters underneath.

But these large pieces were broken in the form of arches, and with their abutments resting upon the banks. resisted a long time the enormous pressure brought to bear against them. But it was only a question of time, and patiently did the spectators wait until the

mighty mass would give way and the fate of the bridge be decided. Leaning on the parapet of the bridge, they anxiously watched as the increasing ice brought down by the current showed that above the ice was breaking in good earnest. Pieces as large as the floor of a house, and over a foot thick, would chase each other among the many channels, until reaching the pond, they would slide over it and grind against the increasing barrier that was damming the water and forcing it to find new channels in the neighboring fields.

At last the critical moment came, and with a loud crash the whole body of ice commenced to move and pour over the fall caused by the dam. In a second the bridge was evacuated, and the breathless spectators, each running to the side where his house stood, watched anxiously for the next development. Would the ice get so broken as to pass under the spans, or would the large cakes reach entirely across, and all their efforts of the morning have been spent in vain?

The whole mass swung around, one side having given way first, and the first cakes swept by without causing any obstruction, but the last and largest piece caught between the piers and hung there a moment. Happily

the sunshine and the warmth of the air had softened it, so that it could not stand the pressure long, and with a vicious snap it broke in two and swept majestically by.

All danger was averted, and the bridge held till night a crowd of sightseers, who admired the entrancing spectacle of the resistless torrent carrying on its bosom numberless ice cakes, which as they tumbled over each other seemed to be running a race as to which would the sooner reach the ocean. As the water tossed them about, and plunging over the dam, they would disappear for a moment, then rise out of the water with a jump, they brought to mind an endless shoal of dolphins as they play around a ship at sea.

The next morning not a piece of ice was to be seen, but the current had somewhat risen, and as the same day a heavy rain set in, which lasted twenty-four hours, the whole valley was submerged, and houses in low places were for many days standing in the water. Nor were many bridges in the valley saved, most of them being swept off by the ice on that Sunday afternoon, and the one near the home of the Meltons would undoubtedly have shared the same fate if that piece of ice had not been dislodged.

The snow went off with a rush, and soon all damages were repaired, the people holding themselves lucky that no more mischief was done by the water. But the breaking up of that year was long remembered, and those who were present still talk of the time when the streets were turned into a river, and floating logs found their way into the first story of their houses, and were deposited in their parlor as a sort of novel ornament.

CHAPTER IX.

SUGARING OFF.

Richland is in the heart of the maple region, and every farm has its maple grove which supplies its owners with an abundance of sweets all through the year. Making sugar is the first work of spring, and in fact often commences while the winter still lingers on. As soon as the snow begins to melt off and the days to get warm, the sap commences to run, and measures are taken to gather it in large amounts and boil it down.

Farmer Melton's grove was situated on the

hill side, a little back from his buildings, and as soon after the freshet as the soil had acquired sufficient firmness for his team to pass over it, he commenced his preparations. He usually hired a man to help him, but this year on account of the lateness of the season, the prospect was not favorable to a large yield, and he concluded to do the work with the help of Prof. Platt who had volunteered his services, which the old gentleman willingly accepted. Late springs are not conducive to a large gathering of sap, the vegetation being too hurried and the flow, while strong, not lasting very long. On the other hand, in early springs, the flow is often checked by the return of cold snaps, and the time when the sap can be gathered is greatly extended.

So it was already April when Farmer Melton, accompanied by the Professor, hitched his team to the sleigh and repaired to the small frame house which stood in the midst of the grove, and not only contained the furnace with the large iron kettles where the sap was boiled, but also the numerous pails which at that time already replaced the small old fashioned troughs hollowed out of a piece of slab, which had done duty for the first

settlers. Arrived at the sugar house, as it was called, the sleigh was loaded with as many pails as it could hold, and Farmer Melton armed with an auger which he used to freshen up the incisions of the past year, and the iron spiggots which served to carry the sap to the pails, went first from tree to tree making everything ready for the Professor, who following with the team, would place the pails so as to receive the running sap.

The day was warm, and the sap was in full flow, and drip! drip! it soon commenced to run, and by the time their task had been accomplished, the work of gathering the sap had to be commenced. For that purpose a large open vat was fastened on the sleigh, into which as they drove amidst the trees, the full pails were emptied, and when enough sap had been gathered, the sleigh was driven to the hill side above the buildings, and the sap conveyed by pipes to a large trough inside, from which the kettles were filled.

This was before the time of the evaporators, which have so much reduced the amount of labor, but at that time the boiling of the sap required a great deal of work, being often kept up till late at night.

In that work, Mrs. Melton and the girls

participated, especially Adeline, who was ever ready to go to the sugar camp. Lizzie was willing enough to let her go and remain at home to do the work. Not only the Professor's company had little attraction for her, but she could no longer ignore her condition, or hope to keep it a secret much longer.

Poor Lizzie went through a great deal of mental suffering at that time, for the compensations for the pains and dangers of motherhood were not yet open to her, and she was undergoing all the dread of keeping a secret which she knew would cause great sorrow to her parents. For herself she felt no shame as to her condition, for she had that true feeling of womanhood which glories in maternity, and an inward and inborn belief that no sense of wrong can attach itself to the fulfilment of natural functions.

No! her mental distress was not for herself, but because she knew how it would affect her mother and sister. She did not have the same feeling as to her father, for she knew him well enough to be confident that he would stand by her and welcome to his heart her fatherless child. Gossip had no effect on him, and she knew that no one would dare in his presence to cast a slur upon her.

But if she knew that her father would not seriously suffer, she knew also that the case would be entirely different with her mother and sister, for not only do women suffer more intensely than men from such disgrace, but their character was such as to place them at the mercy of the gossips of the town. Measured by the true standard of morality, they were greatly inferior to her father and herself, for to them the crying sin was not so much in one's actions, but in their bearing upon one's reputation. Whatever could be concealed could be smoothed over and forgiven, but what could not be hidden was to be openly condemned, and the sinner made to pay the full penalty of her actions.

As the time passed and she could no longer blind herself to her condition, Lizzie brooded over these things, and felt but little interest in the pleasures and recreations of the young people of the neighborhood. Her health was not only good, but in fact better than it had ever been before, and the stimulus of healthy motherhood acting upon her, she felt a strong physical buoyancy and a happiness in life for its own sake, which was strongly at variance with her mental despondency. On one hand, her whole physique rejoiced at the

fulfilment of woman's allotted task, while her mind felt to the full the stigma that an ignorant civilization forces upon girls in her condition.

Such a state of things, as she well knew, could not last very long, and yet while for her parents' sake she wanted to put off the evil day as late as possible, had she followed her own desires, she would not have waited till then to make them her confidants. She knew however that her confession could not be much delayed, for she could not expect to hide any longer from the eyes of the world her predicament.

The crisis came a little sooner than she had anticipated, being hastened by her presence at a gathering which usually took place at the time of sugar making. Boiling down the sap is only part of the work, and by no means the most important. At first the juice is not brought to a very great degree of consistency, and before entirely evaporated is allowed to cool off, until a sufficient amount has been collected to warrant the special care and watchfulness which are required to bring it to that point, when it becomes thick enough to granulate and transform itself into sugar in cooling. During that process, the syrup

reaches a certain stage where, if made to cool quickly by being poured upon a pan of snow, it will turn itself into a waxy paste, which has a peculiar taste much relished by the connoisseurs, and if the weather is propitious, invitations to the young people of the neighborhood to come and eat to their heart's content, are quite common.

On these occasions which usually take place in the afternoon, the whole company meets in the sugar camp, and gathered around the kettle, watch with anxious eyes the boiling mass, each giving advice as to the degree of heat or the amount of stirring it ought to receive, testing its quality by dipping the ladle in the syrup, and holding it high in the air and letting it run on some snow collected for the occasion, which has been brought from the remnants of some large drift which had accumulated in some cool ravine in the forest.

And finally, when the critical moment has come, each one armed with dish and spoon receives a plentiful supply of the delicious sweet, and in pairs or groups seek a convenient place, where pouring the hot syrup on pans of snow prepared before hand, strive with each other as to who shall draw the more largely upon the unfailing supply of a

delicacy which can be enjoyed only under such conditions.

With his genial character it was to be expected that Farmer Melton would not lose such an occasion to gather his friends around him, and an invitation to his grove at sugaring off time was relied upon with a sure faith which had never yet been disappointed, and it was not without dread that Lizzie saw the time approach when she would be compelled to meet her neighbors under such conditions as to make her situation difficult of concealment. But the ordeal could not be avoided, for she was of too truthful a nature to feign sickness, or invent some other excuse to keep her in the house, and was brave enough to face the risk, let the result be what it might.

And yet the idea of her being in such a condition was seemingly so preposterous, her steadiness of character so well known, and her dislike to all forms of flirtation and levity so well established, that probably no special notice of her would have been taken amidst the gaieties and excitement of the occasion, if an untoward accident had not called attention to her altered appearance.

Lizzie was always a great favorite with little children. Hers was essentially a motherly

nature, always ready to devote herself to the enjoyment of the young, and in such gatherings, instead of seeking the society of the young men, she looked after the wants of the younger members of the company, and spent her time in seeing to it that none should feel neglected, and that all were provided with an abundance of the sweets which to these children were the chief part of the entertainment. The care thus bestowed naturally bore its fruits, and the children would hang around her and nestle to her, so that most of her time was spent with them and in providing for their amusement.

Among the young girls who had come that day, was Emmeline Davis, a slim girl, tall for her age, who not being used to such petting at home, had almost fallen in love with Lizzie, and who had a habit of following her everywhere, never so happy as when she could nestle to her or walk about with her. And it was this habit which brought about the first suspicion to outsiders, and showed Lizzie that the time had come when she must speak to her parents.

Lizzie had been helping a group of the children to a second portion of the syrup, and noticing that the snow in their pans was fast

melting away, started with Emmeline to go to a ravine at a little distance, where a belated drift enabled them to replenish their supply of this important material for the feast. As they went, Emmeline, who had had her fill of good things, and not only felt very happy but also very loving, put her arm around her companion, and aware of a change, with the unconsciousness of youth, exclaimed:

"Miss Lizzie, how big you are getting!"

Lizzie could have turned it off, and it would have passed unnoticed, if just at that time they had not met Mrs. Saunderson, the village milliner and the chief gossip of the town, who with another girl was returning from the same errand. At Emmeline's exclamation, Mrs. Saunderson cast an inquisitive look at Lizzie so full of impertinent curiosity, that in spite of herself Lizzie felt the blood mounting to her face, and knew at once that she was giving her secret away.

And sure enough, in the hour or two which elapsed before the company broke up to return to their homes, she could see little groups gathering here and there in secret confabulation, and while not a word was said in her hearing that related to her, and she tried to conduct herself as unconsciously as she had

done in the beginning, she knew she was the subject of conversation, and that before the week was over her name and condition would be a common topic of gossip, as well among the church members as among the loafers who every day gathered in the bar-room of the village hotel.

And she knew also that the time had come when she must speak to her father and mother, and abide by their decision as to whether she should stay at home, or go out alone in the big cold world.

CHAPTER X.

THE EXPLANATION.

Once Lizzie had made up her mind that concealment was no longer possible, she lost no time in speaking to her parents. That very night, her sister having gone to the village, she took advantage of being alone with her mother to divulge her secret to her.

The interview was a painful one to both of them. Lizzie knew full well that she would get no sympathy from her mother, and instead

of unburdening her heart as many a daughter might have done, feeling that some of the burden which was weighing upon her would be lifted from her shoulders, stated her predicament in a matter of fact way, as an unpleasant piece of news which would call for other family arrangements.

Mrs. Melton was first astounded, then indignant, and could not understand how such a girl as Lizzie, could have so far forgotten her training as to allow herself to be placed in such a position where she would be the talk of the town, and where every one would feel at liberty to point the finger of scorn at her. To her reproaches Lizzie made no answer, except to remark that she never had any training in that direction, and that possibly if her mother had done her duty by her, and taught her some much needed knowledge, she would have known enough to avoid running dangers, which until lately had seemed very shadowy and unreal to her.

Once the first outburst of anger and dismay past, Mrs. Melton began to cast around for ways and means by which the scandal could be averted, and first turned to a marriage with the father of Lizzie's child. But no entreaties or persuasions could wrench his name from

her, Lizzie simply asserting that it was of no consequence, for she never would marry him or give up her child to him. She had ignorantly made one mistake, and was willing to pay the penalty, but she would not knowingly make another.

Finding this most simple solution of the difficulty not open to her, Mrs. Melton next proposed that Lizzie should leave Richland for a time, and go to a large city where the needed secrecy could be secured, and after her confinement she could dispose of her child and come back when the whole thing had blown over. She pointed out to one or two such cases which had occurred within her own knowledge, and although it was true it had made quite a talk for a time, as no child had been there to keep the remembrance fresh before the public, the whole thing had been forgotten, and even one of the girls had married well. But to this proposition Lizzie would not listen any more than to the other. She would go away if they requested it, but leave her child, never! Her whole soul which revolted at the idea of an unloving marriage as a means of escape from the world's censure, revolted ten times more at the idea of abandoning her child to the care of strangers.

That unsatisfactory conversation was prolonged long after their usual bed time, and was finally ended by Lizzie reminding her mother that her father would have to be consulted, and expressing the wish that he should be told that night. Mrs. Melton reluctantly gave the desired promise, for she instinctively felt that her husband would side with her daughter, and she was anxious to commit Lizzie to some measure that would ward off the dreaded scandal before she had time to consult her father. But they could not well talk together any longer without running too much risk of being interrupted by Adeline and Prof. Platt who had gone to the village, and might return any moment. So they separated with the understanding that Mr. Melton, who had been in bed for some time, would be made acquainted with the situation without any unnecessary delay.

Lizzie spent a bad night. The events of the day, coming so unexpectedly upon her, had set her mind at work and unsettled her usual even poise; and the uncertainty of her future until she knew what her father would decide, had thrown her in a ferment which for a long time prevented her from enjoying her usual rest. So it was late before she came

down stairs, and the family had not waited for her, her mother making some of those excuses that women always have at command to explain her very unusual absence from the morning meal. Thus Lizzie did not see her father till she had breakfasted alone and left the house to seek him at the barn, where she was told he had gone and was busy about some work.

Mr. Melton, like all the men of his placid and slow nature, was not given to much outward display of emotion, but the news he had received from his wife had stirred him to the very depths. Lizzie was not only his favorite child, but he was proud of her. In his estimation she was infinitely superior to all the persons of his acquaintance, and stood upon a pedestal far above her surroundings. He not only loved her with a love far surpassing that which he had for his wife, but he both admired and respected her.

That his Lizzie should be placed by the act of a scoundrel in a position where the respect shown to her by all the inhabitants of the village should be turned to scorn, where the esteem she had enjoyed from all those who knew her would make their condemnation of her doubly severe, was a hard blow to him.

Not to his personal pride, as it would be to Mrs. Melton and Adeline, for he had none of that foolish feeling which leads too many of us to look upon the approbation of our neighbors as the one thing necessary to happiness, but he had seen enough of this world to know that Lizzie's life would be entirely changed, and that she had before her the hardest trial that can be endured by a self-respecting girl. He understood and approved her determination to stand by her child and face the world, but he knew also that it would make the fight doubly hard upon her.

What a comment upon our present civilization, that the girl who in Lizzie's position, so far neglects the most sacred duty of motherhood as to turn her child over to the cold care of strangers, escapes nearly scot free from the censure of the world, while the one who, with a higher appreciation of her responsibilities, and probably also greater capacity for a mother's love, raises her child herself, keeps it under her care, makes him her companion, is cast out of society, and looked upon as a pariah by her sanctimonious sisters.

Mr. Melton never thought to blame his daughter, nor did she fall one iota in his estimation. All his wrath was expended on

the author of her trouble, who had undoubtedly accomplished his purpose by means unworthy of a true man. Although Lizzie had not been willing to disclose his name, her parents had had no trouble to make a fair guess at his identity, and while it explained to Mr. Melton Lizzie's refusal to marry him to escape from disgrace, and he could but sympathize with her decision, yet his wrath was all the greater, for he felt that it was a base return for all the kindness Charles had received at their hands.

So it was with mingled feelings of sorrow and anger that he saw Lizzie standing before him as she silently made her way to where he was at work. Strange enough that in a man blessed with so much good nature, anger was the feeling that predominated at the first sight of her.

"The vilain! the vilain!" he exclaimed as he caught her by the hand, his face working and all his frame shaking with emotion. "To think that he should bring that disgrace upon you."

"Don't father, don't," exclaimed Lizzie, who realized at once how strongly her father felt for her, and who in her sorrow and doubt felt as if a weight had been raised from her,

as the knowledge came upon her as a flash that he would take her part, and that in him she would find the support that she so much needed. "Don't say anything against him, father. I have forgiven him, and you must forgive him also. What has been done can not be undone, and it will do no good to harbor ill feelings against one who is now gone and whom I hope we will never ses again." Thus tacitly acknowledging the charge against her cousin.

"My poor girl," said Mr. Melton, softening at once and sorrow taking the upper hand. "My poor girl, that such a thing should happen to you is more than I can understand. You who are so strong, so steady, so little given to care for young men's society. Oh! how sorry I am that such a thing should have happened." And his wrath blazing out afresh. "I will never forgive him, the scoundrel."

Lizzie let that last exclamation pass, and expressed at once that which was uppermost in her mind.

"You will not ask me to leave home, father? You will not turn me out of doors? Oh! if you will only let me stay I shall not mind it so much, for after all what can the people do except talk?"

Mr. Melton's eyes filled with tears. Lizzie, the strong, the self-reliant girl, had put such an accent of entreaty in her demand that it went to his heart. He went up to her, took her in his arms, and with a voice broken with emotion, said:

"Lizzie, my dear, you shall stay right here, and whatever your old father can do to help you, you may be sure that I will do."

After a moment of silence, his strong nature asserted itself, and the innate power of the man came again to the front.

"Let them talk, if they dare, Lizzie; they will have to do it behind my back, or by the powers above, if a word of reproach is said in my presence, I will see to it that the next time they keep silent when I am around."

Strength gives strength, and the honest indignation of the usually mild-mannered man did Lizzie a world of good. She had come to the barn greatly depressed in spirits; her interview with her mother had only brought dissatisfaction, and sharply accentuated the widely different way in which they looked at all questions, and she had felt that if her father should take the same view it would be impossible for her to stay with them and that sooner or later she would have to

seek a new home, and leave behind, probably for ever, all that was dear to her.

But it did not take many words to show that the community of thoughts which she had always felt existed between her father and herself, would not now be broken, and that he would still stand by her, not only on account of his great affection, but, and that was the precious boon her heart wanted, because he approved of her decision, and was willing to give her his moral support.

After a lengthy and somewhat desultory conversation, Lizzie left the barn with a lighter heart than she had had for many days. The dreaded explanation was over, and the results had been better than she had expected or dared to hope, and from that day on she would not be keeping a secret from her parents, which to a person of her open and fearless nature was something very repugnant.

At first the knowledge of her condition did not affect much the routine of their life, but it brought some changes as time passed by.

The first was the departure of Prof. Platt, which came naturally and by mutual consent. He had spent the winter in pleasant quarters, and had enjoyed himself during that time, but he had made but little money and his

purse was getting low, and he must seek a more promising field if he would fill it again without too great exertions. Richland had been a very fair field in a small way, but it had been thoroughly worked and he had extracted every penny that it would yield to a man of his attainments.

He pondered long whether he would propose marriage to Adeline before he left, but decided adversely to her great disappointment. It is probable that the knowledge of Lizzie's condition had something to do with his determination to leave Richland, for he felt that before long he would have to leave the Meltons, but it would not have prevented him from speaking to Adeline and entering into a formal engagement. The good health of Mr. Melton, and the fact that if he married Adeline it would probably be years before he could enjoy the share of property that would fall to her lot, was probably the reason which had the most weight with him.

So Adeline had to see him go without hearing the words spoken which she had expected, and while he uttered to her many sentimental phrases, and let her understand that he preferred her company to that of any other girl, yet he was careful to say nothing of a

binding nature, and only left behind the impression that he was sorry to leave, and would return as soon as he could conveniently do so.

Life at the farm became very dreary to Adeline after Prof. Platt's departure, and as the condition of Lizzie became more known, it threw a certain restraint upon her relations with her friends, so as the time of Lizzie's confinement approached, she gladly accepted an invitation to visit some dear relatives in another state, and thus managed to escape an unpleasant situation.

It was characteristic of the puritanical training of these people that no confidence ever took place between the sisters. Nothing of a satisfactory nature could have been said, for the feeling uppermost in Adeline's heart was resentment against her sister for the disgrace her conduct reflected upon her. At heart the same feeling animated her mother, but her maternal love kept it in subjection, and no woman fails to be interested in the birth of a grand-child, even if ushered into the world under such unfavorable conditions.

So the last months of Lizzie's probation were not unhappy. As the time approached her maternal heart filled with love for the coming stranger, and while she staid at home and

saw no one, her time was all taken up in necessary preparations.

In due time a boy was born to her, who, to her great joy, did not in any way resemble his father, but on the contrary gave good promise of becoming a worthy scion of the old Melton stock, and very soon began to show many of the quaint ways of his grand father. The child grew and throve, and as the days passed, so entwined himself around the heartstrings of his mother and grand parents, that they soon began to look upon his presence as a beam of light in the homestead.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PROPOSAL.

William Horner lived on the hills, which in that section of the country meant that his social position was not quite as good as if he had lived in the valley. Had he wanted to run for squire or selectman, it would not have told against him, for the people who lived on the hills were just as good and respectable as the dwellers in the valley, but when it

came to matrimony, it must be acknowledged that it made a difference, and that it would diminish his chances of success.

This is indeed a queer world! For it does not seem that the width of the roads, or the freedom from snow drifts in winter, ought to have anything to do with marriage, but really the cause of this distinction came from the difference in the ease of communications. The top of the hills is a wide rolling country, with good farming advantages, but to reach it from the valley the roads are either very steep, or follow streams which have cut their way through deep ravines, and these roads are both narrow and crooked. The land on the hills being much cheaper, the farms are larger and the houses far apart, and in winter the roads being but little travelled and much subject to drifts, it often happens that after heavy snows several days pass before communications are opened.

It is not so in the valley. The main road is straight, broad, level, and by constant travel always has a well beaten track. It is lined with well built houses, and in the villages which are found every three or four miles, dwell the doctor, the preacher, the store keeper, the justice of the peace, in a

word that class of people who in these sections represent the best intellectual development of the country. Many of the inhabitants of the village are men who once lived on the hills where they own good farms, and who by energy and good management have secured a competency, and in their old days have moved in the valley to avoid the isolation of their farms. However, they have not sold their land, but rented it, so that now quite a share of the population on the hills is made up of tenants.

Thus it has come to pass that through a process of natural selection, there has grown social distinction, and the valley people have come to look upon themselves as a little better than their neighbors on the hills. And yet if the truth must be told, so far as real worth is concerned, the advantage is with the people on the hills, for if they are not wealthy, they are a hard working, honest, reliable set of people, while in the skirts of the village are found the loafers, the idlers, the frequenters of the bar-room, and all the hangers on who congregate wherever there is a class that has got above the necessity of manual labor.

I do not believe, however, that these considerations would have had much influence on

Lizzie Melton, for she cared but little for society, and certainly cared nothing for the social distinctions which seemed so important to the other girls, but they influenced William in his suit and prevented him from pushing it as urgently as he might have wished. And there was another and more formidable obstacle in the way. He was the son of a widow, his father having died while he was yet very young, and Mrs. Horner was one of those good women who are very hard to get along with. She was a managing woman, prim, smart, given to fault finding, and not very charitable in disposition. The farm belonged to her, and she had managed it since her husband's death, and evidently intended to manage it to the end of her days. She had managed her son as long as she could, and it was only William's easy disposition that enabled him to get along peaceably with her. Mrs. Horner had a sincere love for him, but it was one of those loves that are tyrannical in their manifestations, and instead of encouraging him to seek for a wife, and helping him to get settled in life, she was really miserable at the thought that another woman might supplant her in his affection. It will thus be seen that she was not a very desirable

prospective mother-in-law, and that in the days that were past, before Charles Delormes came to Richland, William had good reasons for feeling a little doubtful as to the result of his suit.

And yet, neither the fact that he lived on the hills, nor that his mother was not a very lovable woman, would probably have prevented Lizzie from accepting him long before our story opens if he had been more urgent. Had he been masterful instead of diffident, and had he pressed his suit in and out of season, Lizzie would evidently have yielded and this story would never have been written.

But William was too diffident for that. I do not mean that he was bashful, and blushed and stammered in the company of girls, but I mean that he did not value himself at his true worth, and did not give enough weight to his good qualities. If it had been a question of holding his own in a contest with men, he would have had all the needed confidence, but when it came to marrying, it seemed to him that he had nothing to offer that such a girl as Lizzie would care to accept. That was a great mistake, for in all that which makes a true man, and especially in those qualities which are calculated to make a woman happy

in married life, he was the peer, if not the superior, of any young man in those parts.

With a little more self-esteem William would not have been quite as worthy of Lizzie's acceptance, but he would have greatly increased his chances of success, for Lizzie cared for no other man, and had a high opinion of him; and with all her strength of character, she was woman enough to yield to a man with positive ways.

Deep down in the heart of the most strong-minded women there lurks a remnant of the slave, which leads them to admire strength, and often to submit to authority. It is an inherited weakness, of the same nature as man's tendency to give a pretty girl his seat in the street cars, and let a homely one stand, and probably the world will be much older before these remnants of past ages are eradicated, and women cease to admire manly strength, and man to admire womanly beauty.

But William had not pressed his suit when it would have insured its success, and the events of the past few months had certainly put him in a difficult position. For, as my readers can see for themselves, if he still cared for Lizzie the birth of her child was a hard blow to him; much more so than for any of

the other persons concerned. It is true that Lizzie had lost her good name and had to submit to the slights that some persons are always ready to offer on such occasions, but she had her boy, and to her it was full compensation, and as the child grew, and she enjoyed to the full the happiness of motherhood, she lost all regret for what had taken place, and was really happier than she ever had been. And Mr. Melton felt the same way, and even Mrs. Melton and Adeline, if not quite reconciled soon got to love the little boy and forgot the shadow his presence cast upon them.

If William had been a weak man, he would have cast Lizzie out of his heart, and like many another man before him, would have quickly courted and possibly married another girl to prove to the world that he had a proper regard for his reputation. Had he been strong and a philosopher, he would have braved the world's opinion, and would have followed the dictates of his feelings, regardless of the talk it might have caused.

And his feelings would have led him to still seek to induce Lizzie to become his wife, for his affection for her remained the same, and her misfortune had in no way lowered her in his sight. And having that manly quality of

always feeling like taking the part of the defenceless, the very sneers and innuendoes, and often too coarse jests, which in such places are always freely bandied, and which could not but sometimes come to his ears, made him eager to openly take her defense, and offer the protection his name would give her.

But he was neither very strong morally, nor a philosopher, and had been halting between half a dozen decisions. At times, he felt quite courageous, and ready to take the control of his life into his own hands, and almost decided that he would ask Lizzie to marry him, and thus defy the world and blot out all that had taken place in the past. Then again, the thought of his mother, and that she never would be reconciled to see Lizzie as his wife —for he knew but too well her ideas on sexual morality—and also a natural shrinking in a man of his character from any action which would mark him as holding opinions different from those of his neighbors, would hold him back, and the whole question would once more have to be discussed in his own mind.

And thus the days passed without anything being done, except that he had paid some visits to the Meltons, but aside from strengthening him in his determination to stand by

Lizzie and marry her if he could get her consent, they had proven barren of results. For their relations were no longer what they had been in the past, and while Lizzie always treated him as a friend, she made no effort to talk to him, and when he came seemed to be always busy with some housework or occupied with her child; which was quite natural conduct on her part, for as he had made no sign, and they had never been more than friends, she could have no idea of thoughts that were in his mind, and certainly she could not suppose that he might still want to marry her.

But such a state of indecision must finally come to an end, and gradually a plan was forming in William's brain which he thought would remove all difficulties. It was to marry Lizzie, and move out West with her to some new section of the country, where their antecedents would be unknown and where the boy would naturally pass for his own child. Even after this thought came to him, it took him some time to make up his mind, for he did not want to leave his mother. But that was really the only objection, and there were so many advantages to the plan that he finally decided to speak to Lizzie the first chance he could get.

He had little doubt of her consent. He knew she liked him, for he had realized the change in her feelings after the departure of her cousin, and it would enable her to leave a neighborhood where, to say the least, life could not be very pleasant. He knew it would not be very easy to get the opportunity to have a long talk with her, for it could not be at her house without attracting too much attention, and he would have to wait until he met her when she went out on an errand.

For Lizzie went out quite often. As soon as she recovered from her confinement she commenced to go to the village carrying her baby with her. She did not do it as a matter of principle, or to defy public sentiment, but because it was the course most natural to her. She was strong and active, and enjoyed to be out of doors, and now that she could no longer make calls, and had ceased to go to church, whenever the weather was fine and something was needed from the store or a letter had to be mailed, she would bundle up the baby and take him out for an airing.

These short trips were a great pleasure to her. At first, those of her acquaintances she chanced to meet would either avoid her or pass by with a cold nod of recognition, but

the storekeeper was always polite, because the Meltons were good customers, and as the novelty of the thing wore off and the child grew, one after the other of her old acquaintances would stop and talk and have something pleasant to say to the baby.

And Lizzie, woman like, fell in love with her boy, and grew quite proud of him. He became so much a part of her that she forgot that the world called him illegitimate, and when some one had something pleasant to say to him, she felt just as proud and happy as if she had been a married woman. All this does not mean that Lizzie had recovered her place in society, very far from it, for plenty of things not so pleasant happened to make her realize that she was not looked upon in the same light as other girls, and had she had less self-respect, and had she been less taken up with her child, she would have spent many bitter hours. But her open and self-reliant course had been a benefit to her, and her position in the village was much more satisfactory than if she had been ashamed of her child and had left it behind when she had occasion to go out.

William knew that Lizzie often went to the store, and before long managed to come up

with her. Either by accident or design, he was one morning driving to the village in his buggy, when he spied her ahead of him, going in the same direction, carrying her child. Here was the opportunity he had been seeking and hurrying his horse soon overtook her.

"Good morning, Lizzie," he said as he drove to the side of the road where she was walking. "Going to the village, I suppose. Get in and ride, it will be easier than to walk."

Lizzie had stopped when he caught up with her, and looked at him a little astonished, for young men no longer asked her to ride, and she knew that it took some courage for William to drive up to the store with her and her child, and her first thought was to decline his offer.

"Good morning, William," she answered. "No, I thank you, I do not mind walking." And she turned to keep on her way.

"Oh! but stop, Lizzie, I want you to ride," exclaimed William, afraid to lose the chance to speak to her. "Get in, I want to talk to you."

Lizzie stopped and looked at him inquisitively, as if to see if he really meant what he said, and a look at his anxious, honest face, convinced her that he was in earnest.

"Well, William," she said, "if you really wish it, I will certainly ride with you."

And walking to the buggy, she handed him her boy and stepped lightly in.

After seeing that she was comfortably seated and patting the baby on the cheek, William sat silent quite a while, as if embarrassed how to commence the conversation. Finally turning to her, he said:

"Lizzie, would you mind taking a longer ride, for I have much I want to say to you, and I don't want to say it right here in the village. Suppose we go up the road a mile or two."

Lizzie consented, wondering what it was he wanted to say, never dreaming that it would be an offer of marriage, for she had put such thoughts very far from her. William was silent, and they went by the store, where the loungers looked at them with wondering eyes; and it was only when the last house in the village had been passed that William broached the subject that was on his mind.

"Lizzie," he said, "you know that I have wanted you for my wife for many a year, but somehow I haven't had the courage to ask you yet, but I will not wait any longer, and want to know if you will marry me now."

These words certainly took Lizzie by surprise

and went right to her heart. Her eyes filled with tears, and it took her a little while to recover herself so that she could answer.

"You are too good, William, but it cannot be. I have given up all thoughts of marriage, and you must not think any more of me."

"Oh! Lizzie, I have thought of nothing else these many months past, and I am not going to stop unless you tell me that you do not like me well enough to take me for your husband."

And now that the ice was broken, William launched into a long explanation of his plans, and how they would quietly get married and move out west, and he would give the boy his name, and they would start life anew where she would regain the place she had lost in the eyes of the world. Of his mother he said but little, but Lizzie knew her well enough to understand that if they were married he would have to leave the farm, and that for his sake also it would be preferable if they left Richland.

Lizzie listened attentively to all he had to say, but evidently it did not convince her, for when he was through she shook her head and told him that while she agreed with most of what he said, there were reasons why she could not consent to act as he wanted.

"Listen to me," she said, "and I will tell you what stands in the way. The chief reason, I believe, is that I do not want to leave Richland. I may be foolish, but I have done no wrong and I am not going to run away and hide myself in another country. I have my own pride, William, and I know that I am as worthy of respect as any woman in the village, more so really than some who now look down upon me with contempt, and I am going to stay right here, and to regain the respect of the community without any one's help, not even yours.

"I thank you with all my heart, William, and I shall never forget this day, for it is a great pleasure to know that I have such a good friend, but if the truth must be told, since my boy was born he so fills my thoughts that there is no room for me to think of a husband. I like you as a friend, but I love my child, and I will not contract any ties that would make me divide with another the love I have for him."

William listened in silence, not knowing what to answer. He was not strong enough to combat her objections, and only feebly tried to bring forward some of the reasons that had seemed so conclusive to him a few

hours ago. The strongest plea he made was when he represented to her that it would take off from the boy the stigma of illegitimacy. But to that Lizzie replied that the argument would have had more force if the child had been a girl, but that with our present double standard it did not affect much the success of boys. Besides there was no knowing if their moving to another state would prevent their story being told, and should the truth become known, their new associates would have a right to believe that there was some blemish upon her character, that she had to leave home and settle among strangers. No, she thanked him sincerely, and would be glad to have him for a friend, but he must give up all thoughts of marriage with her.

So William was once more disappointed, but it made a great difference in their relations henceforth. Before he left her at the store on their return, it was understood between them that he would often visit her, and from that day he spent much time at the Meltons'. Their drive through Richland was a sort of official notice to the public that they had resumed their former relations, and William became her regular escort, taking her out for a ride as often as opportunity offered.

Of course all this made talk, but it helped the position of Lizzie, for William was esteemed by all, and she slowly won her fight. She was no longer ignored, and was invited to parties, and even the church would have opened her doors to her, but she went out but little, and cared nothing for society, living a life of quiet satisfaction, her hands busy with her work at home, and her heart filled with love for her child.

CHAPTER XII.

THE HORSE RACE.

Aside from his love for Lizzie, William had another weakness. He was fond of a good horse, and took pleasure in horse racing. Not that he ever betted, but he himself drove as good an animal as his means afforded and enjoyed to see horses run; and to go to horse races was his only dissipation, in which he indulged more or less every year.

Twenty miles north of Richland is found the town of Smithville, which is reached by following up the valley, until it ends in a

gap between rugged hills. On the other side of the gap the view opens upon a vast expanse of rich farming country, on the edge of the body of land which is known as Central New York. Smithville is an inland town, too isolated for commerce or manufactures, but it is a wealthy place, and the farmers all around are very well off. Although a dairy country, these rich farmers are very much given to keeping good horses, and some of them are breeders of choice stock, so that Smithville is something of a horse racing place, and boasts of a very fair racing ground.

At that time trotting matches were just coming into vogue, but the trotting horses of the United States had not yet reached the speed for which they are celebrated to-day, and a horse which could trot one mile in three minutes was considered fast enough to be talked about. Flora Temple, George Patchen, Dexter, were just becoming known to fame, and bicycle tires, ball bearings and running mates were as yet unknown. But people were getting interested in trotting horses, and all over the country men who had good roadsters were putting them through their best paces, with the result that many of them developed considerable speed.

The races at Smithville were not known all over the United States, but they were well known all over that section of the country, and William always attended them if it could be managed. And in the fall of the second year in which our story opens, his attendance at these races brought him face to face with Prof. Platt, who had come to Smithville in the guise of a patent-right seller.

William, with one of his neighbors, had driven over the first day of the races, and was putting up his horse at his accustomed livery stable, when he met a man who reminded him forcibly of Prof. Platt. The same tall form, square shoulders, loose action of the limbs, the same slight limp; but his face was covered with a heavy growth of whiskers, and a pair of spectacles hid his eyes from sight. William was about to extend his hand in greeting, when the man went right past him without any sign of recognition, and he had no alternative but to draw back, with a word of apology as to having mistaken him for some person with whom he was acquainted. Hardly knowing what to make of it, he asked the hostler who was that gentleman who had just walked out, and was informed that it was a Mr. Gentry, who with a friend of his, James

Fox, had come to Smithville two or three days before and was canvassing the county with a patent churn, trying to sell the right.

That same day he saw the pair drive past the hotel where he was stopping, and with their horse, they made a queer aggregation. James Fox was a man of about fifty, with a smooth face, except for some days' growth of a beard plentifully mixed with gray, his features were bloated as if in the habit of drinking, with bloodshot eyes to match. He was small, hardly reaching to Mr. Gentry's shoulder, lean, wizened in appearance, and with a cunning leer in his small eyes. His clothes were old and neglected, and taken altogether he had a disreputable appearance which was in quite a contrast with that of his companion.

They were riding in a heavy spring wagon with a model churn behind, and their horse was a real curiosity in a community where every person prided himself on the appearance of their turn-outs. Large, tall, nearly seventeen hands high, with legs remarkably long, raw-boned, poor, apparently ill-kept, he seemed hardly able to draw their heavy wagon; his eyes alone showed clear and bright, and to a judge of horse-flesh denoted good blood and staying qualities. It was such a horse as

a sharper would use to catch the unwary, and as we shall see answered that purpose admirably.

Before William left Smithville, he convinced himself that Mr. Gentry was no other than Prof. Platt, who for reasons of his own did not want to be known by his Richland friends, and from this on I shall call him by the name by which he is best known to my readers.

The race ground, situated about half a mile from the village, boasted of a mile track, and both days a large number of people congregated there. The first day, as usual, was given to the least important races, the best being reserved for the second day; in the morning for running horses, and the afternoon for the trotting stock. There were many horses that had quite a local reputation, and on them a good deal of money had been staked, for it must not be supposed that these owners of broad and fertile acres, prosperous with the high prices which were paid for agricultural products at the end of the war, would not be ready to back their favorites, and really a great deal of betting was done and much money changed hands.

Nothing very exciting took place the first day or the morning of the second. Some very

good running was made, many spectators enjoyed the sport, but what is only usual on such occasions. Prof. Platt and his companion were much in evidence, addressing the crowd and seeking to dispose of their patent rights, but it was only on the second afternoon that they attracted much attention. The last race of all was to be at three o'clock, a trotting match of three one-mile heats, the best two out of three. About one hour before the race was to take place, the two men drove into the grounds, with James Fox bearing all evidences of being the worse for drink. His high and rusty stove pipe hat set on the back of his head, a stump of a cigar stuck in the corner of his mouth, he was talking loudly and gesticulating, paying no attention to Prof. Platt's evident efforts to keep him quiet.

Many of the spectators were driving back and forth on the track, and Fox taking advantage of a moment when the Professor had left him alone in their wagon to go and speak to some one he knew, addressed the crowd generally, boasting loudly that his horse could beat anything on the ground, to prove which assertion he gave him a great cut with a stump of a whip he held in his hand, which made the horse jump and start at a pretty fair

pace, scattering the people in all directions.

The crowd jeered and evidently was ready to have some fun out of him. "Go it, Crowbait!" some one cried out. "Crowbait! Crowbait!" took up the boys, which made Mr. Fox mad, and alternately beating his horse and sawing on the reins, he drove back to the stand, declaring that Dandy Jim, as he called his horse, could beat anything that Smithville could bring along. Prof. Platt noticing the outcry, tried to pacify him, but with little success, and for a while Fox made a fine exhibition of himself driving recklessly up and down the track, but at times getting pretty fair speed out of his ancient animal.

But the time had come when the race was to begin, and the track had to be cleared, so Prof. Platt got up with his companion and they took a position not far from the stand.

Seven horses were entered, but everybody knew that only two stood any chances of success. One, Gen. Lyons, belonged to a lawyer of Smithville, and was a brown gelding, low in stature, plump, smooth, with a quick motion which enabled him to develop great speed for a time, but a little too fat, and otherwise not promising well for sustained action. The other, Beauty, was the property

of a well-to-do farmer, and was a gray mare of good size, not quite so active, but with a long, swinging step, and ease of motion which furnished abundant proof that she could sustain her best pace a long time without distress. All the horses were driven by their owners, and the whole thing showed plenty of evidence that it was a race among amateurs and not among members of the profession.

The race came off nicely, but was really nothing very brilliant. Gen. Lyons and Beauty easily distanced their competitors, some dropping out after the first heat, and others after the second. The third was hotly contested, but the greater endurance of Beauty carried the day, and she came in victor by a length amidst the plaudits of the spectators, winning for her owner the purse of two hundred and fifty dollars which was given as a prize, as well as whatever money he may have put upon her.

While the race was going on, Prof. Platt had had much trouble to keep his companion quiet, and when it was over he could hold him no longer. Fox drove right on the track, proclaiming loudly that his horse could do better than that. The crowd cheered him calling out: "That's right, Crowbait! Go it

Crowbait! Five to one on Crowbait!" But while they laughed and jeered, no one paid any attention to his offers to bet until he raised himself on the seat, and shoving his hand in his pocket, he fished out a very respectable roll of bills which he brandished in the air, daring any one to take him up.

A man half drunk, with a roll of bills in his hands, and ready to bet, is sure to find takers, but Prof. Platt snatching the bills away from him, jumped out of the wagon and tried to pacify him. But without avail, Fox swearing by all the gods that the money was his, and if he chose to lose it it was nobody's business, and that anyhow Dandy Jim could beat Gen. Lyons, Beauty, or any other horse that Smithville could bring against him.

Some one in the crowd seeing as he thought a chance to pluck a stranger, had looked up Beauty's owner, so as to make up a match between the horses, and give the crowd an opportunity to win some of Fox's money. The owner of the mare, with his pocket full of the money he had won, and flushed by his good success and some libations in honor of his victory, was ready for the scheme, and Fox would soon have had his money all staked if Prof. Platt had not intervened.

Letting Fox talk on, and paying no attention to what he was saying, the Professor addressed the crowd in general and Beauty's owner in particular, and in smooth, polite language explained that his friend was in a fair way to make a fool of himself, and that the least he could do was to see that too much advantage should not be taken from him. He was willing he should run one race, which they could see for themselves was as much or more as their horse could stand, and as his friend was, well, let us say hardly in a fit condition to drive, they must give him some odds. To that they all willingly agreed, and Prof. Platt selecting a well known citizen to hold the stakes, commenced to place his friend's money. At first they gave him odds of three to one, but as the roll of money diminished, the crowd began to bid against each other, the last bets being made as high as ten to one in favor of Beauty. When the money had been all laid out, Prof. Platt asked for a half hour's time for them to exchange their heavy wagon for something lighter, which was also readily granted.

As soon as the preliminaries had been all arranged, James Fox who had been talking at random and driving up and down the track,

at once cooled down and left the grounds. The crowd waited for his return, somewhat wondering at the change in his demeanor, and opened its eyes wide when he returned on time, a very different man. His face was clean shaven, his eyes were bright and he sat straight, holding a firm rein in his hands. His rusty stove-pipe hat had been replaced by a neat jockey cap, and his shabby coat by a new jacket. He was riding a light sulky, and his horse also seemed different. He was still the same high, rawboned horse, but skilfully driven by a man who evidently knew all about the art, he held his head high, and stepped with an ease that certainly no one in the crowd would have expected.

No one cheered him, and the cry of "Crow-bait!" raised by somebody in the rear, found no answer, for all those who had put money on the mare felt that they had been sold, but as everything had been done regularly there was no drawing back from the contest. Evidently the man was not drunk, and knew what he was about. The mare might still beat the horse, but they saw that the chances were that their money was lost.

And the horses had not gone very far before they knew it, and the result of the race was

not left in doubt an instant. As the horses passed the starting post, and the word to go was given, Dandy Jim straightened himself and shot out like a ball from a cannon, and with his long legs reaching far out at every stride and moving as evenly and regularly as a piece of machinery, he took the lead at once and kept it to the end. Beauty did her best, but she was overmatched and at the last lost heart and broke repeatedly.

When Fox had come past the winning post, he stopped his horse, turned him around and drove past the stand toward the village. As he went by he pulled off his cap, made a bow to the crowd, and with a wicked leer in his eye, said: "Gentlemen, Crowbait is pretty good after all . . . to catch suckers." As he said the last word, he gave a peculiar whistle, and Dandy Jim shot off again in his best style, which was a wise thing for Mr. Fox, as the crowd was in an ugly temper and in no mood to stand being laughed at.

Prof. Platt hastily collected the money, and then sauntered out of the grounds, but when the people returned to the village they found that both men had disappeared. Fox had returned the sulky and settled the bills, when both had left for parts unknown.

Their hasty exit was not due to a fear of the law, for they had committed no fraud, but probably to a feeling that for the present the people of Smithville would much prefer their room to their company. It was never exactly known how much booty they had carried off, for those who had been plucked did not say much about it, but it was thought to have been over one thousand dollars; a pretty good haul for such a community. The question as to who was James Fox, and where he had got his horse was never settled, but it was surmised that he was an old jockey who had lost his standing with the fraternity on account of trickery and dissipation, and as for Dandy Jim, his description answered pretty well to that of a horse which had, years before, made quite a reputation in a distant state. That race naturally made a good deal of talk in Smithville, and William heard enough to satisfy him, if he had had any doubt on the subject, that Mr. Gentry was no other than Prof. Platt.

I may as well say here that it was the last time that he crossed the path of our Richland friends, and that Adeline, after hearing what William had seen, gave up all hopes of the Professor coming back to her, and Mrs. Talbot,

the sickly wife of the Sunday school superintendent, having opportunely departed this life at that time, Adeline, after waiting the regulation period, became Mrs. Talbot No. 2, a position which she filled in a manner satisfactory to all the parties concerned, and was probably much happier than if she had married Professor Franklin S. Platt.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ACCIDENT.

Five years after the time when we first became acquainted with Farmer Melton, we find William, Lizzie and the boy riding in a buggy on a fine morning in the fall of the year, on their way to the county fair at Nettleburgh.

Except that they look a little older, and that the boy is considerably larger, very little change has taken place in their appearance and in their mutual relations. Lizzie is still with her parents, less inclined than ever to leave them now that Adeline is married and settled in another home, and William is still her devoted follower, coming regularly to see

her, and is ever ready, as on that day, to take her out on pleasure excursions. Nothing now stands in the way of their marriage, unless it is Mrs. Horner's opposition, and William has broached the subject, but so far without results. The truth is that Lizzie is satisfied with her present position, and does not understand why William should want a change, and thus the days pass, and while in her heart Lizzie realizes that this cannot last for ever, she is certainly in no hurry to assume relations that from her point of view would complicate matters without any corresponding benefits.

She believes in letting well enough alone, and William is the victim of his own too easy disposition. There are plenty of such men in this world, who possessing the best of qualities and well qualified to make a woman happy, either never marry or settle late in life, simply because they are not positive enough and too easily discouraged; and many of them when courting in their bashful way some girl anxious to get married, give her much trouble in devising how she can best induce him to declare his intentions.

Between these two, however, the ice had been broken, and had Lizzie cared for it they would have been married long before this, but

on that bright morning, when they started for Nettleburgh they had no thought of marriage, and were only intent upon having a pleasant outing. It was characteristic of their relations that they took the boy along, but it was the desire of Lizzie, for she always enjoyed herself better with him. However, she was no longer in love with her child, and in fact William was gradually supplanting him in her heart, but this she did not realize, because their relations were of such a nature that the boy's presence was no restraint upon them. These two were not lovers, as the word is usually understood, but they were what is really nearer, the very best of friends, and if not given to love making, were never better satisfied than when in each other's society.

Nettleburgh is on the Erie railroad, and near the Susquehannah river, and is a place of some importance, and the county fair held there is always well attended. The grounds are large and well kept, with comfortable buildings, and the prizes are of a substantial character which draws many competitors.

The road from Richland is level, straight, broad, and in the fall is as nice a drive as the heart of man can desire, and William's fast horse carried them swiftly over the fifteen

miles which divided them from their destination. The place was crowded, but William was well known and managed to secure accommodations, and by ten o'clock they were on the grounds which were on the edge of the river and very near the town.

They put in the morning seeing the exhibits of which little need to be said. There was the monster pumpkin and the patched silk quilt of revolutionary times which are found at every self-respecting fair, as well as the usual display of fruits, jellies and marmelades. But aside from all the standbys, there was a choice collection of plants and flowers, exhibited by a rich citizen of Nettleburgh, who had horticultural tastes, and who found pleasure in allowing the public to enjoy his exhibit, of which Lizzie profited to her heart's content, for she had a great love for flowers, a taste she could not gratify to any extent in Richland. They also enjoyed some fine music furnished by a dealer in musical instruments, and William also found some things to admire in the way of buggies, harness and agricultural implements.

In the afternoon there was to be a grand display of all the animals entered at the fair, which were to be marched in procession before

the judges, and the trio, after a substantial dinner and rest at the hotel, returned to the grounds to secure a good position. The parade was to be reviewed at one end of the grounds, where a stand for the spectators had been erected, which however would only accommodate but a small part of the crowd, and before that stand, all the animals led by their owners went past in regular succession.

Although there was a large throng of people, there was no accident until the last of the parade, when something happened which had an important bearing upon the life of our friends. The last animals in the procession were the horses, and among them were several very fine stallions; one of them, a large dapple gray was of fierce temper, and was controlled with much difficulty by his owner. Unhappily in front of him was another horse of glossy black to which the gray seemed to have taken a violent antipathy. Several times as they were walking around, the gray made frantic efforts to break loose, but his owner, a powerful man of some thirty years, armed with one of those short, but heavy whips, used on such occasions, had held him tight and had kept him subdued.

But as they were circling around to leave

the stand, suddenly the gray horse rose on his hind feet, his head high in the air, so that his master was carried clear off the ground, and standing thus rearing and pawing wildly with his forefeet, swung the man back and forth and shook him as a cat would a mouse, till he finally threw him heavily against his own flank.

Did the shock stun the man or did the horse strike him with his feet? It never was clearly ascertained, but the man let loose of the reins and fell prone to the ground, and the horse as soon as he felt himself free, made but one bound toward the black horse, which by that time had got some twenty feet away from him, and which, wild with terror, wrenched himself away from his driver, and with the speed of an arrow as it leaves the bow, dashed across the crowd with the gray in hot pursuit. The black proved the swiftest horse, and reaching his stall rushed into it just in time to escape his enemy, which was secured before he could make any more mischief.

For in their mad race they had caused a serious accident. The crowd, as the horses ran through it, had scattered right and left with a cry of terror. William and Lizzie were

about one hundred yards distant, Lizzie outside, and the boy right in the track of the maddened animals. William, as he realized the danger, had only time to cry out: "Run! Lizzie, run!" as he stooped to pick up the child, but before he could straighten himself with the boy in his arms, the black horse coming right at him, struck him a tremendous blow which stretched him senseless to the ground.

The whole thing passed like a flash, and before Lizzie had time to realize what had happened, she saw her boy thrown violently out of William's arms. She naturally rushed to him first, but soon found that he had received no serious injuries, having been protected from the force of the blow by William whom she quickly saw had lost his senses, and was laying stretched upon the ground.

Several persons were already around him, and a doctor had been sent for, but at the sight of his pale face and prostrate form, all her latent love for him woke up in her, and gently kneeling by his side, she took his head in her arms and bathed his face with some water some thoughtful person had quickly brought.

William soon came to, and when he opened

his eyes and he saw who was kneeling by him and ministering to him, was only conscious of a pleasant impression of having met with a lucky accident. But the doctor who arrived at that time found, after a cursory examination, that his arm was broken and his shoulder dislocated, besides a possibility of some internal lesion. So a carriage was quickly procured, and he was taken to the hotel where he received the attention his condition required.

When his arm had been set and his shoulder replaced, and he lay quietly in his bed, Lizzie found that she must take a quick decision. Should she send at once for his mother and leaving him in her hands, return home with her boy, or should she stay with him and nurse him until he got well?

Her heart prompted her to stay and repay him by her devotion for the danger he had run in saving her child, for she knew, as well as every person who had seen the accident, that it was in saving the child's life that he had received the blow which had disabled him. But only as his wife could she expect to supplant his mother, who she knew would not allow her to stay unless she was married to him.

Her decision was quickly made, for the shock had awakened in her all the feeling of affection she had for William, which was laying dormant, and the sight of his pale face as he lay in bed, appealed to her sympathetic heart with much greater force than the pleadings of the strong man, seemingly so able to get along without her.

So when the doctor had left and all had quieted down, Lizzie asked to be left alone in the room, when she went to William, took his sound hand in her own, and gently stooping over him kissed him, the first kiss he had received from her.

"William," she said, "you have saved my child's life, and my life is your own to do as you please with it."

William, who had been wishing he could keep Lizzie for his nurse, and who was always thinking of the time when she would marry him, flushed with pleasure and a happy look came into his eyes. Gently disengaging his hand, he put his arm around her neck, and bringing her ear against his lips, whispered: "Will you marry me, Lizzie, some day?" And as Lizzie bowed her head in assent, he became bolder and said: "Will you marry me to-day?" "Yes," she whispered back, blushing

like a young girl, under the influence of feelings which had till then been unknown to her.

William slowly brought her face around until his lips met hers. "Kiss me, my wife," he said, and after a long embrace, laid back on his pillow with a satisfied look which told Lizzie how much he prized her affection.

She sent at once for the hotel keeper and explained to him the situation, and asked him to make the necessary arrangements, and a couple of hours later a quiet marriage took place which united their lives and brought to William the reward of his long and patient wooing much sooner than he had hoped.

And now that they are married, I wish I could close this story in the good old style, and say that they were happy ever after, but while they enjoyed undoubtedly more happiness than usually falls to the lot of mortals, marriage, in this prosaic age, is no longer looked upon as the talisman which opens the door to unalloyed felicity, and aside from the vissicitudes which are sure to come to all humanity, they had their special thorn in the flesh in the conduct of Mrs. Horner. A messenger had been sent to her as soon as possible after the accident which befell her son, but it was not till the next morning that she

could reach his bedside, and of course she knew nothing of his marriage, so that she came with the expectation of staying and nursing him back to health.

But when she found Lizzie established in his room, and learned of the marriage, she froze up at once, and while she contained herself and did not give vent to her feelings, she would not stay, and excusing her actions on the plea that William had made his choice, and that she would only be in the way, she went back, her heart full of bitterness against the woman who had robbed her of her son. And while there was no open rupture, all the efforts of her children failed to soften her, so that when in due time William could be moved he did not take his wife home to his mother, but instead they remained with the Meltons, where they certainly found life much more pleasant.

As in duty bound they paid Mrs. Horner regular visits, but she never came to see them until after the birth of a little daughter, who being in truth and really her own granddaughter, and not as the boy nobody's child, found favor in her eyes; and as the years passed and the children came in regular succession, they formed a bond which brought

about a complete reconciliation. But William and his wife never went back to live on the hills. As she grew older, Mrs. Horner would have been glad to turn the farm over to her son, but it was too late, for he had become necessary to Mr. Melton, and she had to end her life in solitude, thus reaping the crop that she herself had sown.

And now many years have elapsed since the incidents I have described have taken place; the old people have been gathered to their fathers, William's and Lizzie's hairs have turned gray, their children are married and the young voices heard on the farm are those of their grand-children. The valley has changed but little, not being much affected by the railroad which now traverses it in its whole length. The people live the same lives, but it must be acknowledged that dogma is losing its power, and that as a result charity is on the increase, and that girls in Lizzie's position meet with more forgiveness and less condemnation.

Lizzie is kind to them, and they always receive help from her and such assistance as she can give to help them to retain their own self-respect. She is as much interested as ever in the movement for the equality of

the sexes, but has never attained any prominence in the woman's rights ranks, probably becau-e at first she had enough to do to fight her own battles, and later, her home and children left her but little time for other occupations.

Her ardor has also been somewhat cooled by her own experience, for she cannot help remembering that in her hour of trial it was not from the women that she received the moral help that she so much needed, but that it was her father and William who rallied to her support. And her judgment is clear enough to understand that so long as women allow themselves to be guided by the fear of public opinion instead of their own judgment, and are more afraid of the world's censure than of failing of their duty toward those in need of help, any attempt to raise them to a higher level will meet with but little success.

Yet if she is not quite so enthusiastic, she sees no reason to be discouraged, for women are undoubtedly growing stronger, and are slowly getting a better appreciation of their duties and of their rights.

THE END.

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