

## ON THE PIAZZA AT HARWOOD'S

BY HELEN CAMPBELL.



HE had watched her daily since her coming, but she did not know it. And now they talked together if she found him alone, and always she had a bright nod for him as she settled into the nearest chair and opened her book.

He was an invalid slowly recovering from the disaster that left him partially paralyzed, a rolling-chair his vehicle and the piazza of the old house his present limit. He was well over fifty. She could not be more than twenty-five at most, he thought, looking at her with a certain wistfulness, for her face stirred old memories long buried; twenty-five, probably, for there was experience in her eyes in spite of their girlishness. He added as he made this statement to himself, that at the present day age appeared to be ignored at will, and more and more men and women marched peacefully toward the century line, with no marked or serious diminution of power or enjoyment.

The group on the most desirable portion of the piazza held one of that order; an old lady of magisterial presence, her determined countenance framed in puffs of white hair, her bright dark eyes hard still, and with absolute clearness of mind as to what she wanted or did not want. To her, various other old ladies in rocking-chairs, coming year after year to Harwood's, were in total subjection, and waited timidly her directing word as to the day's topic of conversation, and the people who might or who might not be admitted to the sacred circle.

The girl was a stranger and a presumptuous one, for she wore her pretty clothes with an easy unconsciousness that had roused instant antagonism in the old lady's mind—a girl coming from no one knew where, New York, perhaps, from the way she wore things, but it might even be Chicago, and taking a place near them with no perception, it seemed, that this group stood for Beacon Hill and its passing generation of owners by birthright. All else in the uni-

verse was mere tributary; really a quite irrelevant matter when one considered all that being born on Beacon Hill involved.

The girl in the meantime held her place. She had come in from the rocks, a book with leaves still uncut in her hand, and in her eyes the wide, clear look as of the sea itself stretching fair and calm to the far horizon line, a sapphire sheet under a sky blue as Capri. She had settled in this corner just so day after day for the hour before dinner, nominally reading, actually studying this unknown order with an interest that held a growing amazement.

The invalid watched them all and he knew. They had views, or at any rate the old lady had, though she suppressed summarily attempt at utterance of any but her own. "The Czar," the girl already called her, for never could there be more absolute autocrat, or more submissive subjects. As to the invalid, his rights were recognized up to a certain point, but he held his corner silently and was considered to be principally asleep. The girl had looked toward him pityingly, as she first saw him, and now smiled and nodded as she came out, but thus far she had made her brief stay without words and disappeared again, her grave, clear look on them all as she slipped away, yet little dimples at the corners of her mouth momentarily visible. The Czar had caught the look and resented it with fury, and her subjects wondered with her what order of being it might be that wore it. She had brought no letters, she named no endorers. She simply came and went calmly as if the ground were her own, and no one to question.

This was defiance pure and simple, the old lady announced, and the invalid laid down his book as he heard, and gazed in some amazement at this singularly belligerent old person, who had risen and was driving her subjects before her like so many sheep.

"Twenty-three years at Harwood's," she said, "and never before have I been subjected to the insolence of an uninvited presence. I shall speak to Harwood. It is really intolerable. Some shop-girl in borrowed plumage, prob-