

## CHOICE LITERATURE.

## FROM JEST TO EARNEST.

BY REV. R. F. ROR.

## CHAPTER XXIX.—HEMSTEAD'S ADVICE, AND LOTTIE'S COLOURS.

Soon after the departure of Mr. Martell and his daughter, Hemstead pleaded headache, and retired to his room. Lottie, to escape De Forrest, had also gone to hers, but soon after, at her brother's solicitation, had accompanied him to a neighbouring pond to make sure that the ice was safe for him. But though she yielded to Dan's teasing, her compliance was so ungracious, and her manner so short and unamiable, that with a boy's frankness he had said:

"What is the matter with you, Lottie? You are not a bit like Aunt Jane to-day. I wish you could stay one thing two days together."

As may be imagined, these remarks did not conduce to Lottie's serenity. She did not understand herself; nor why she felt so miserable and out of sorts. She had fallen into the "slough of despond," and was experiencing that depression which usually follows overwrought emotional states, and—her knight had disappointed her.

Having learned that the ice was firm, and assisted her little brother in putting on his skates, instead of returning at once to the house, she sat down in a little screening clump of hemlocks, and gave way to her feelings in a manner not uncommon with girls of her mercurial temperament.

Now it so happened that Hemstead, gazing listlessly from his window, saw their departure, and soon afterward it occurred to him that the fresh air would do his head more good than moping in his room. By a not unnatural coincidence, his steps tended in the same direction as theirs, and soon he found Dan sprawling about the pond in great glee over his partial success in skating; but Lottie was nowhere to be seen. But a sound from the clump of evergreens soon gained his attention, and a moment later he stood at the entrance of her wintry bower, the very embodiment of sympathy, and wondering greatly at her distress.

A stick snapped under his tread, and Lottie looked up hastily, dashing her tears right and left.

"What did you come for?" she asked brusquely.

"Well, I suppose I must say in truth—I wanted to. I hope you won't send me away."

"You ought to have given me a little warning, and not caught me crying like a great baby as I am."

"I wish I were your friend," he said humbly.

"Why so?"

"Because you would then tell me your trouble, and let me try to comfort you."

"I haven't any trouble worth naming. I've just been crying like a foolish child because I was out of sorts. There, don't look at me so with your great, kind eyes, or I will cry again, and I am ashamed of myself now."

"Something is troubling you, Miss Marsden, and I shall be very unhappy if you send me away without letting me help you."

"You would think me a fool if I told you," she faltered.

"No one will ever charge you with being that."

She gave him another of her quick, strange looks, like the one she fixed upon him when he first moved her to tears by weaving about her the "spell of truth." It was a look akin to that of a child who learns by an intuitive glance whom it may trust. After a moment, she said:

"If you were less kind, less simple and sincere, I would indeed send you away, and not very amiably either, I fear. And yet I would like a few crumbs of comfort. I scarcely understand myself. Monday and yesterday I was so strangely happy that I seemed to have entered on a new life, and to-day I am as wicked and miserable a little sinner as ever breathed. The idea of my being a Christian—never was farther from it. I've had nothing but mean and hateful thoughts since I awoke."

"And is this not a 'trouble worth naming?' In my judgment it is a most serious one."

"Do you think so?" she said gratefully. "But then I'm provoked that I can be so changeable. Dan just said, 'I wish you could be the same two days together,' and so do I."

"Let us look into the matter," he said, sympathetically, sitting down in a companionable way on the fallen tree beside her. "Let us try to disentangle this web of complex and changing feeling. As the physician treats the disordered body, you know that it is my cherished calling to minister to the disquieted mind. The first step is to discover the cause of trouble, if possible, and remove that. Can you not think of some cause of your present feelings?"

Lottie averted her face in dismay, and thought "What shall I do? I can't tell him the cause."

"Because you see," continued Hemstead, in the most philosophical spirit, "when anything unpleasant and depressing occurs, one of your temperament is apt to take a gloomy, morbid view of everything for a time."

"I think you are right," she said faintly.

"Now, I see no proof," he continued, with reassuring heartiness, "that you are not a Christian because you are unhappy, or even because you have had 'hateful thoughts,' as you call them. You evidently do not welcome these 'hateful thoughts.' The question as to whether you are a Christian, is to be settled on entirely different grounds. Have you thrown off allegiance to that most merciful and sympathetic of friends that you led me to see last Sabbath as vividly as I now see you?"

Lottie shook her head, but said remorsefully, "But I have scarcely thought of Him to-day."

"Rest assured, He has thought of you. I now understand how He has sympathy for the least grief of the least of His children."

"If I am one, I am the very least one of all," she said humbly.

"I like that," he replied with a smile; "Paul said he

was the 'chief of sinners' and he meant it too. That was an excellent symptom."

A glimmer of a smile dawned on Lottie's face.

"And now," he continued hesitatingly as if approaching a delicate subject, "I think I know the cause, of your trouble and depression. Will you permit me to speak of it?"

Again she averted her face in confusion, but said faintly:

"As my spiritual physician I suppose you must."

"I think you naturally felt greatly disappointed that Mr. De Forrest acted the part he did last evening."

This speech put Lottie at ease at once, and she turned to him in apparent frankness, but with somewhat of her old insincerity, and said:

"I confess that I was."

"You could not be otherwise," he said, in a low tone.

"What would you advise me to do?" she asked demurely.

It was now his turn to be embarrassed, and he found that he had got himself into a dilemma. The colour deepened in his face as he hesitated how to answer. She watched him furtively but searchingly. At last he said, with sudden impetuosity as if he could not restrain himself:

"I would either make a man of him or break with him forever. It's horrible that a girl like you should be irrevocably bound to such—pardon me."

Again Lottie averted her face, while a dozen rainbows danced in her moist eyes.

But she managed to say, "Which do you think I had better do?"

He tried to catch her eye, but she would not permit him. After a moment he sprang up and said, with something of her own brusqueness:

"You had better follow your own heart."

"That is what Mrs. Dlimm said," she exclaimed, struck by the coincidence. "You and Mrs. Dlimm are alike in many respects, but I fear the world would not regard either of you as the best of counsellors."

"Whenever I have taken counsel of the world, I have got into trouble, Miss Marsden."

"There, that is just what she said again. Are you two in collision?"

"Only as all truth agrees with itself," he answered, laughing.

"Well, perhaps it would be the best to follow the advice of two such sincere counsellors, who are richly gifted with the wisdom of the other world, if not of this. Your talk has done me more good than I could have believed. How is it that it always turns out so? I'm inclined to think that your pastoral visit will do more good than your sermons."

"Now have pity on me, in regard to that wretched sermon. But I know of something that will do you more good than either, in your present depression. Will you wait for me ten minutes?"

"Yes, longer than that," she said, with a little emphatic nod.

He at once started for the house with great strides.

"My 'depression' is not very great at the present moment," she chirped, and giving a spring she alighted on the fallen tree as a bird might. "I had 'better follow my own heart,' had I? Was there ever more delightful doctrine than that? But bless me, whither is it leading? I dare not think, and I won't think."

And so to keep herself warm while waiting, she balanced up and down on the fallen tree, trilling snatches of song as a red-breasted robin might twitter on its spray.

Soon she saw her ghostly adviser speeding toward her in another guise. A stout rocking-chair was on his shoulder and skates dangling from his hand, and she ran to meet him with anticipatory delight. A little later, Dan, who had been oblivious of proceedings thus far, was startled by seeing Lottie rush by him comfortably ensconced on a rocking-chair and propelled by Hemstead's powerful strokes. This was a great change for the better, in his estimation, and he hailed it vociferously. Hemstead good-naturedly put the boy in his sister's lap, and then sent them whirling about the pond, in a way that almost took their breaths. But he carefully shielded them from accidents.

"It's strange how you can be so strong, and yet so gentle," said Lottie, looking gratefully up at him over her shoulder.

"I haven't the faintest wish to harm you," he replied, smiling.

"That I should ever have wished to harm him!" she thought, with a twinge of remorse.

After a half-hour of grand sport, the setting sun reminded them that it was time to return.

"How do you feel now?" he asked.

"My face must be your answer," she said, turning to him features glowing with exercise and happiness.

"A beautiful answer," he said impulsively. "In colour and brightness it is the reflection of the sunset there."

"I admit," she answered shyly, "that its brightness has a western cause. But speaking of colour reminds me of something," and her eyes twinkled most mirthfully, as she caught a glimpse of something around his neck. "What have you done with my 'colours,' that I gave you last night? I know you wore them figuratively in your face this morning, when Miss Martell so enchanted you; but where are they, literally? Now a knight is supposed to be very careful of a lady's colours if he accepts them."

"I have been; and Miss Martell has never seen your colours."

"Oh, those so manifest this morning were hers. I understand now. But where are mine?"

"I cannot tell you. But they are safe."

"You threw them away."

"Never."

"Why, then, can't you tell me where they are?"

"Because—because. Well—I can't; so you need not ask me."

"If you don't tell me, I'll find out for myself."

"You cannot," he said confidently.

"Mr. Hemstead, what is that queer crimson fringe rising above your collar?"

He put his hand hastily to his neck, and felt the ribbon

that his stooping posture and violent exercise had forced into a prominence that defied further concealment; then turned away laughing, and, with his face now vying with the sunset, said:

"You have caught one ostrich hiding with its head in the sand."

Her merry laugh trilled like a song of a bird, as she exclaimed:

"O guilt, guilt, the western sky is pale compared with thy cheeks."

Then, taking his arm in a way that would have won an anchorite, she added, with a dainty blending of mischief and meaning, "I, too, am an ostrich to-night—that is, in my appetite. I am ravenous for supper."

"I, too, am an ostrich!" What did you mean by that?" and Hemstead pondered over this ornithological problem for hours after.

## CHAPTER XXX.—AROUND THE YULE LOG.

Lottie's radiant face at supper, in contrast with her clouded one at dinner, again puzzled certain members of the household; and De Forrest, to his disgust, learned that while he slept she had again been with Hemstead. He resolved on sleepless vigilance till the prize was secured, and mentally cursed the ill-starred visit to the country over and over again.

Bel was cool and cynical outwardly, but was really perplexed as to what ought to be done. With all her faults she had a sincere affection for her friend, and was shrewd enough to perceive that this affair with Hemstead promised to be more serious than Lottie's passing fancies had been previously. But with her usual weakness and irresolution she hesitated and waited, Micawber-like, to see what would "turn up."

The impression grew on Mrs. Marchmont that Lottie was fascinating her nephew; and yet, just how to interfere she did not see. It was rather delicate business to speak, with nothing more tangible than what she had yet seen. That Lottie herself was becoming sincerely attached to a young man of Frank's calling and prospects, could not occur to a lady of Mrs. Marchmont's ideas of propriety and fineness of things. "It was only Lottie's 'inveterate disposition to flirt.'" As to Lottie's "moods and emotions," she smiled at them with cool indifference, as far as she noticed them at all. "Young people pass through such phases as they do the measles," she was accustomed to say.

Addie was too much wrapped up in herself to think much about others.

Save queer, little, chuckling laughs, which no one understood, Mr. Dimmerly gave no sign that he noted anything unusual going on.

Besides, Lottie was very circumspect when in the presence of others, and Hemstead unconsciously followed the suggestion of her manner. Thus even lynx-eyed Bel could seldom lay her finger on anything and say, here is something conclusive.

But if ever there was an earthly elysium, Hemstead and Lottie dwelt in it during the remainder of that week. Not that they were much together, or had much to say to each other by word of mouth. Scarcely another opportunity occurred for one of their momentous private talks, for De Forrest's vigilance had become sleepless indeed.

Besides, Hemstead was shut up in his room most of the time, engaged on another sermon. For Dr. Beams was quite ill, and the student had been asked to preach again. He gladly complied with the request, for he was most anxious to correct the dreary impression he had made the previous Sabbath. Lottie, too, was much in her room, at work on something which no one was permitted to see. But little was thought of this, for the house was full of the mystery that always prevails just before Christmas. Every one was cherishing innocent, and often transparent, little secrets, which were soon to be proclaimed, if not on the "house-top," on the tree-top of the fragrant cedar that had already been selected and arranged in the back parlour, suggesting to all the blessedness of both giving and receiving.

And yet, while seemingly separated, what moment passed when they were not together? How vain was De Forrest's vigilance—how futile Mrs. Marchmont's precautions. Lottie was the muse that sat at Hemstead's side; and every time he lifted his eyes from the paper his vivid fancy saw her face glowing like the sunset, and beaming upon him. She inspired his sermon. Unconsciously, he wrote it for her alone, letting her need and spiritual state colour the line of thought which his text naturally suggested; and a fresh, hope-inspiring, Christmas sermon it promised to be—a veritable Gospel. He unconsciously was learning the priceless advantage to a clergyman of pastoral visitation; for, in discovering and meeting the needs of one heart, nearly all are touched—so near akin is humanity.

And as Lottie stitched away at an odd bit of fancy work—very different from anything that had ever taxed her dainty skill before—strange gleams flitted across her face. At times her eyes would sparkle with mirth as she lived over scenes in which the student was ever the chief actor; and again she would grow pale, and her breath come quick and short, as her fancy portrayed him—when in the darkness he could not have been seen by human eyes—far out among the ice upon the river. Then again her face would glow comically pitiful, as she murmured:

"I could have brought him to quicker than uncle. I could have given him a stimulant more potent than the forty-year-old brandy of which uncle is so proud. I've found out my power over him."

Then her face would light up with exultation as she exclaimed, "Oh, it's grand to have such power over a strong, richly-endowed man—to be able to move and play upon him at your will by some mystic influence too subtle for prying eyes to see. I can lift him into the skies by a smile. I can cast him into the depths by a frown. If I touch his hand the giant trembles. He would be a Hercules in my service, and yet I've got him just there"—and she depressed her little thumb as confidently as a Roman empress might to some gladiatorial slave.

Then her face would change in quick and piquant tran-