

## CHOICE LITERATURE.

## THE TALE OF A TORNADO.

"It's an ill wind that blows nobody good."

Esther Williams sat on the kitchen door-step, one summer afternoon, thinking it all over. She was tired, that was plain; her drooping attitude, and the haze over her blue eyes showed it. She had just finished the family ironing,—no slight labour with the thermometer eighty-five in the shade. Three hundred and fifty, at least, it seemed to be in the kitchen. It was all well done at last; and Esther, while her flushed cheeks and blistered hands returned to their ordinary colour under the light breeze, sat, resting and "thinking it over."

Her eye, with an expression of inward trouble, regarded the distant form of the Rev. Jeremiah Williams, who, arrayed in a rusty alpaca coat and old straw hat, was engaged, notwithstanding the heat, in "bushy" his peas. A tall, stooping figure meandering about the garden in a way that betokened both weakness of body and absence of mind; indeed at this moment Mr. Williams was very likely saying to himself "Thirdly, my brethren, predestination, whereby we mean the decrees of God or the eternal counsel of His will;" for the most evil disposed of his parishioners had always allowed that he "gave himself to his work."

He was a most unworldly man. Strong in his own sphere, he was pitifully helpless beyond it. When his wife died there was danger of his losing connection with all outward things; but Esther, then fifteen, had thrown herself bravely into the awful chasm of the household and brought back her father to life and comfort. As her four young sisters grew up they helped according to their ability; but nothing could take from Esther the memory of those first years of struggle. She had come to look upon her father as her baby—an inspired baby, yet with all the helpless dependence that binds her child to a woman's heart as with chains of adamant.

It should not be supposed that the feminine population of Brayton were remiss in their efforts to fill the vacant situation of minister's wife; but his daughters, warned by some precocious instinct, ranged themselves about their unconscious father like the foster-brothers in the "Fair Maid of Perth;" and woe betide the spinster who penetrated that living wall. The good man's own thoughts meantime were either wrestling with some dark and mysterious doctrine, to "make it light in the Lord," or dwelling on those heavenly heights, where he humbly hoped, as he would say, through grace shown to the chief of sinners, to meet, one day, his lost Joanna. So the best-meant efforts of his devoted parishioners fell to the ground.

He was a very able preacher of the old school, and he lived on a salary barely sufficient to keep his family in existence; they kept no servant, did everything themselves, and lived very plainly; but there was a cloud of something worse on the horizon. Mr. Williams' health had declined and there were rumours of dissatisfaction in his church; and that was one among other things that gave the sadness to Esther's blue eyes.

Her meditations were disturbed by the click of the gate latch, and her three sisters trooped in from school, where Jennie was a teacher, and the twins, Mary and Martha, scholars; while little lame Susy, seeing the parliament assemble, from her perch at the window, came, limping, to join them.

"Had a hard time to-day, Jennie?" inquired Esther of her junior partner, as that young lady threw herself down and tossed off her hat, with a disturbed and sour aspect.

"No worse than usual," was the reply. "I hate children; especially in such hot weather. But, Esther, Sarah Brown walked down with me this morning, and made me so furious, that I have just been boiling ever since. 'While I was musing, the fire burned,' as David says. O, I know I had his trials; he does speak so to the point at times. But just listen. You know that man who preached at the other church last summer. Well, they are talking of him for papa's place."

"Why, Jennie!" cried Esther; "Papa said he wasn't orthodox."

"Can't help it," replied Jennie; "probably they like him all the better; they must have novelty, you know; and maybe it's a pleasant excitement to hear a minister blaspheming in the pulpit and to try and believe what he says. They'll be tired of going to Heaven some day, and will want to take the other place, by way of a change; and then set to work to develop themselves out of it."

"Oh, dear!" sighed Esther; "do you suppose it was last Sunday's sermon?"

"Oh, no; but it helped on; they say it was Calvinistic and doctrinal; but the trouble is, that they want a younger man and a live man; that means a man who hangs to the platform by one foot, while he stamps; the other and throws both arms in the air, leaning over at an angle of forty-five degrees, and shouting himself hoarse; and then, 'usac' to the other end and suddenly becomes as meek as a lamb and remarks, 'My friends, let us love each other and develop our humanity!'"

"Oh, Jennie!"

"It's true; Mr. Howe did all that, and they call him a live man."

"Poor papa!" sighed Esther again, "it is hard on him." "Yes," said Jennie, with a slight sideways nod of her head, "but it will be harder for them some day, you mark my words. If he doesn't look at them from his throne of glory across a great gulf, I'm mistaken. He is just as good as an angel. He has baptized them, and married them, and buried them, and brought them into the church, and shown them how to serve the Lord all these years. Why, good gracious!" cried the young lady, "even if he were stupid, what words could make a sermon equal to that preached by such a holy life? And now because he quotes the Bible in his sermons oftener than Shakespeare or Emerson they desert him in his old age. They are tired of the strait gate and the narrow way. They want to be saved by anecdotes and a resume of the daily papers, with bits

from the classics thrown in so that they may feel themselves familiar with Homer and Plato. They want 'freedom of thought,' and above all 'to be developed.'"

"It is well papa doesn't hear you," said Esther, while the twins laughed.

"Mr. Howe doesn't believe in the miracles," continued Jennie; "and he said in the Bible class that there never was any such man as Solomon; he was a myth and meant the sun, and his palace was the sky; and the Queen of Sheba represented the dawn coming into the sky. Sarah Brown told me so; she thought it was beautiful. Also he taught them that David's fight with Goliath was allegorical and represented the victory of mind over matter; and he said that explained some of the psalms; the enemies David cursed were only material forces that he was bound to get the better of. I told Sarah Brown that if I had been there I would have thrown my hymn book at his head. 'Songs of the Sanctuary' would be a good stout missile."

"What did she say?" asked the twins.

"O, she said I was very narrow, but it wasn't surprising. After all, why should I trouble myself about these people? They will only illustrate their own principle of 'the survival of the fittest'; and we never could get along with such fools in heaven. My temper wouldn't stand it—not if I had twenty pairs of wings. Let us talk about something else. Esther, I met Mr. Burton and he asked me if you would be at home this evening;" and therewith Jennie fixed her two large eyes solemnly on her sister, who shrank from her gaze, as it seemed, and began picking blades of grass and winding them around her fingers.

"Why does he come here so much?" said Martha; "I hope Esther does not think of marrying that fat old thing."

"I hope not indeed," echoed Mary. "Why, he is the Laird of Cockpen to the very life."

"Matty and Molly," said Jennie, turning upon the hapless twins with lofty indignation, "I do wish you would keep your valuable opinions to yourselves until some one asks for them. And I should think after Esther and I have been hard at work all day that you might at least pick a few raspberries for tea, and take Susy with you, who hasn't so much as had her head out of the door since morning. Come, girls, go;" and the twins obeyed, awed, though reluctant.

"Jennie," said Esther with some hesitation when they were alone, "I know what you mean; but you cannot guess how hard it is"—here she looked up and, catching the expression in her sister's eyes, blushed violently and stopped.

"You mean on account of John Russell?" said the experienced Jennie.

"That is not fair," returned Esther blushing still more, if that were possible; "you know he has never asked me. There are reasons enough without that. How can I lie so? How can I pretend I love that man and keep up the deceit all day? My life will be a lie. I shall end by hating him, Jennie; it will kill me."

"Essie, dear," said the other very gently and soothingly, "you make mountains of mole-hills. You will not have to pretend you are in love with Mr. Burton; men of his age do not expect it. You will only have to show kindness and regard, and you know it is easy to be kind to people."

"To ordinary people, yes," murmured poor Esther.

"Well then, there will be no lie about it. You will take him at first for papa's sake and his own; he is generous and kind; as the years go on and you live side by side, constantly doing your best for each other, a strong friendship—an attachment, even—will spring up and make you happy. I have heard it said," remarked Jennie with an air of authority, as if she had been studying the subject during a temporary seclusion in the Ark and ever since,—"that at the end of a number of years there is no appreciable difference between a *marriage de convenance* and a love-match. Besides all this, Mr. Burton can give you the means of gratifying your tastes, though he may not be able to sympathize with them. O, think of it, Essie! Music, pictures, books, travel, society! No more ironing or getting of dinners in a hot kitchen—your beauty all wasted on pots and kettles! Oh! my dear, how I long to see you shining as you ought to shine."

"You are a dear unselfish girl," said Essie warmly; "but these things in themselves couldn't make one happy, Jennie. Especially when I have to leave papa and—you all behind to reach them."

"And there comes in the strong point of the argument," returned Jennie; "there is no doubt that we shall be driven away from here soon. Papa does not know it yet, but there was an informal meeting held last week and it was almost decided that he should be asked to resign. Three-fourths of the church are in favour of it. And worse than all, his health; and poor little Susy—and the girls too young to help much."

"I wish I were a man," said Esther angrily. "I am not clever like you, Jennie, and I have had no time for education; but I am patient and very willing to work. It is very hard that such an one should be forced to go into a dungeon for life, because she is a woman."

"Oh, if we had all been boys it would have been far better," said Jennie in a spirit of mild indulgence towards the mistakes of Providence; "four of us could have taken care of papa and Susy, even if we had worked on a farm; but I am afraid that is past praying for. To think of it," she added in a sudden gust of wrath, "with my talents to be wasted up teaching children at five dollars a week, whereas if my name was Joseph I should be working my way through college. How happy men are; they don't have a sphere. By the way, Esther, a rich woman can do quantities of good."

"Yes, if she is good and true herself."

"Essie, Mr. Burton says you have the most beautiful face he ever saw. He thinks you like Raphael's Madonna. You have only to put out your hand—he is generous and kind, and has a great respect for papa, as you know. He is thankful for the gift of beauty, and the power it brings you of helping those you love in their time of need. I am poorer than you; I can only take care of myself."

"Yes," said Esther, slowly, with colourless lips; "I dare say you are right, Jennie; I will try not to be selfish. I will do my best for everybody. It is time to see about tea now. Papa is coming in;" and the parliament adjourned.

So it came to pass, that when young Dr. Russell came up the piazza steps that evening, he beheld to his great consternation the lady of his yet untold dreams seated in a corner apart, and apparently absorbed in a confidential conversation with the millionaire. Esther did not rise to welcome him, and her smile of greeting, if sweet as usual, was very evidently constrained. Annoyed beyond measure, the young man felt tempted to turn round, and let his one bow serve both for salutation and farewell; but Jennie advanced from the farther end of the piazza and plunged into a stream of voluble talk, from which he found it impossible to escape. The twins also, who cherished a school girl's admiration for the doctor's dark eyes and broad shoulders, appeared delighted with the opportunity afforded them by Esther's retirement; and Russell yielded to fate, and threw himself back in a straw chair with a despairing abandon that seriously endangered his equilibrium, and made the old piece of furniture creak dolefully. The girlish talk, the girlish laughter, flowed on and on, past him, like a babbling brook. He threw in a rejoinder at hap-hazard when it seemed to be expected of him, and laughed occasionally when the others laughed; but his mind was working furiously, on quite another subject. "How long had this sort of thing been going on? Was there anything in it? Was he really in danger of losing his beautiful Esther?" for so he called her with a man's happy vanity, though he had not yet asked her if she would be his Esther. "Was she a girl to marry for money, loving him, as she did, and knowing that he loved her, for had he not said it to her in every way but in words?"

"Yes Miss Mary, you are quite right, I agree with you there. (O Esther, my darling, how can you break my heart so? I think she might leave that old fool five minutes and speak to a fellow before he goes mad.) What did you say, Miss Joanna? I did not quite—" and here the poor young man became conscious of the awful frown that pervaded Miss Joanna's brow whenever she was addressed by her own name pure and simple; and he immediately fell into a slough of blunders, where he wallowed hopelessly, amid the laughter of the girls. And meantime, his Esther's fair face was before him spiritualized by the soft light—the pretty figure in its light summer dress, in its simple and gracious attitude; and the gleaming moonlight to fold her as in a veil, and to separate her from him, as much as if she were a glorified angel. She spoke little, but she smiled often and sweetly; she seemed to listen with interest and her eyes never once wandered to the place where Russell sat.

Her companion was blessed with a full and rolling voice; as befitted a man who owned a million and a half of money, and cared not who knew it. His words were not to be thrown away as might happen to those of less weight on "change;" he had bought a right to the consideration of the world. Mr. Burton was a plump, short man, about fifty years of age, with features, only redeemed from insignificance and even vulgarity, by the expression which they wore of pleasantness and kindness. His short whiskers were of a sandy hue, and he was too evidently growing bald. Some of his rather laboured sentences came to the ears of the other group, but strain his attention as he might, Russell could not catch a word of Esther's low replies.

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Burton; "yes, when finished it will be a handsome house; as good, though I say it, as many of those belonging to the upper class in England. When I was abroad I visited several of the mansions of the nobility, and I always intended when I built to get up something of that style. But what good, after all, will it do a lonely old fellow like me, Miss Esther? What is a fine house without some one to share it with you?"

"Good heavens!" thought Jennie, "is he going to do it here? What shall I do?" For one instant she clenched her hands and set her teeth in agony of mind; then, with an innocent, child-like smile—"O, Dr. Russell," said she, "I have forgotten some things papa told me to take to old Mrs. Larabee who is sick, you know, and so destitute! It is so late now, will you walk up there with me?"

There was no evading this invitation, and Jennie walked meekly but with glittering eyes into the house for her "things." It is sad to be obliged to relate that the commission having been just invented, nothing was prepared for the aged sufferer; but with a groan in her heart at such wastefulness, she abstracted half the "best tea," quickly made a package of loaf sugar, took a lemon that she had spied on the shelf, and was back she hoped "before anything had happened." As Russell went out into the soft darkness, he looked up and caught Esther's eyes with something of a wistful glance in them watching his retreating form; and he walked on silently by his companion's side, perplexed and glum.

"You don't hear a word I say;" said she, after a while looking archly into his face.

"No," replied he; "I am very rude. Shall I tell you what I have been thinking of? How well your sister and that stupid little man would illustrate Beauty and the Beast. I suppose she does not find him uninteresting, however, as she would not leave him for a moment to speak to a friend, whom at least she has known longer."

"No," said Jennie coldly, "I suppose not. I don't think many people consider him stupid. He has seen a good deal of the world."

"A fine advantage, truly," said Russell, growing angry at once. "A man may come out of a pork-packing establishment, or a livery-stable, and ramble over half the surface of the earth, with no more ideas in his head than has the engine which drags him; he may yawn over pictures, go to sleep in cathedrals, and stare at the Sphinx of the desert with eyes as vacant and goggle as her own; then he shall come home and be held to have travelled!"

"That may be true," said Jennie laughing; "but for all that, it is a pleasure to talk with a person so sweet-tempered as Mr. Burton. He is never sarcastic, never speaks evil of others behind their backs; indeed he is a most excellent man."

"Excellent!" fumed the doctor; "I dare say he is, according to his measure. I should think most men could compass enough good to fill out such a capacity as his; it would lie in a nut-shell easily. I have no doubt the June-