



## THE STORY OF A SHORT LIFE.

BY JULIANA HORATIA EWING.

## CHAPTER I.

"Arma virumque cano."—*Æneid*."Man (and the horseradish) is most biting when grated."—*Jean Paul Richter*.

"Most annoying!" said the master of the house. His thick eyebrows were puckered just then with the vexation of his thoughts; but the lines of annoyance on his forehead were to some extent fixed lines. They helped to make him look older than his age—he was not forty—and they gathered into a fierce frown as his elbow was softly touched by his little son.

The child was defiantly like his father, even to a knitted brow, for his whole face was crumpled with the vigor of some resolve which he found it hard to keep, and which was symbolized by his holding the little red tip of his tongue betwixt finger and thumb.

"Put your hands down, Leonard! Put your tongue in, sir! What are you after? What do you want? What are you doing here? Be off to the nursery, and tell Jemima to keep you there. Your mother and I are busy."

Far behind the boy, on the wall, hung the portrait of one of his ancestors—a youth of sixteen. The painting was by Vandyck, and it was the most valuable of the many valuable things that strewed and decorated the room. A very perfect example of the great master's work, and uninjured by time. The young cavalier's face was more interesting than handsome, but so eager and refined that, set off as it was by pale-hued satin and falling hair, he might have been called effeminate, if his brief life, which ended in the field of Naseby, had not done more than common to prove his manhood. A coat-of-arms, blazoned in the corner of the painting, had some appearance of having been added later. Below this was rudely inscribed, in yellow paint, the motto which also decorated the elaborate stone mantel-piece opposite—*Letus sorte mea*.

Leonard was very fond of that picture. It was known to his childish affections as "Uncle Rupert." He constantly wished that he could get into the frame and play with the dog—the dog with the upturned face and melancholy eyes, and odd resemblance to a long-haired cavalier—on whose faithful head Uncle Rupert's slender fingers perpetually reposed.

Though not able to play with the dog, Leonard did play with Uncle Rupert—the game of trying to get out of the reach of his eyes.

"I play 'Puss-in-the-corner' with him," the child was wont to explain; "but whichever corner I get into, his eyes come after me. The dog looks at Uncle Rupert always, and Uncle Rupert looks at me." . . . "To see if you are growing up a good boy and a gallant young gentleman, such as he was." So Leonard's parents and guardians explained the matter to him, and he devoutly believed them.

Many an older and less credulous spec-

tator stood in the light of those painted eyes and acknowledged their spell. Very marvellous was the cunning which, by tabs and streaks of color, had kept the spirit of this long-dead youth to gaze at his descendants from a sheet of canvas and stir the sympathy of strangers, parted by more than two centuries from his sorrows, with the mock melancholy of painted tears. For whether the painter had just overdone some trick of representing their liquidness, or whether the boy's eyes had brimmed over as he was standing for his portrait (his father and elder brother had died in the civil war before him), there remains no tradition to tell. But Vandyck never painted a portrait fuller of sad dignity, even in those troubled times.

Happily for his elders, Leonard invented for himself a reason for the obvious tears. "I believe Uncle Rupert knew that they were going to chop the poor king's head off, and that's why he looks as if he were going to cry."

It was partly because the child himself looked as if he were going to cry—and that not fractiously, but despite a struggle with himself—that, as he stood before the master of the house, he might have been that other master of the same house come to life again at six years of age. His long, fair hair, the pliable, nervous fingers, which he had put down as he was bid, the strenuous tension of his little figure under a sense of injustice, and, above all, his beautiful eyes, in which the tears now brimmed over the eyelashes as the waters of a lake well up through the reeds that fringe its banks. He was very, very like Uncle Rupert when he turned those eyes on his mother in mute reproach.

Lady Jane came to his defence.

"I think Leonard meant to be good. I made him promise me to try and cure himself of the habit of speaking to you when you are speaking to some one else. But, dear Leonard" (and she took the hand that had touched his father's elbow), "I don't think you were quite on honor when you interrupted father with this hand, though you were holding your tongue with the other. That is what we call keeping a promise to the ear and breaking it to the sense."

All the cavalier dignity came unstarched in Leonard's figure. With a red face, he answered bluntly, "I'm very sorry. I meant to keep my promise."

"Next time keep it well, as a gentleman should. Now, what do you want?"

"Pencil and paper, please."

"There they are. Take them to the nursery, as father told you."

Leonard looked at his father. He had not been spoiled for six years by an irritable and indulgent parent without learning those arts of diplomacy in which children quickly become experts.

"Oh, he can stay," said the master of the house, "and he may say a word now and then, if he doesn't talk too much. Boys can't sit munched always—can they, Len? There, kiss your poor old father, and get away, and keep quiet."

Lady Jane made one of many fruitless efforts on behalf of discipline.

"I think, dear, as you told him to go, he had better go now."

"He will go, pretty sharp, if he isn't good. Now, for pity sake, let's talk out this affair, and let me get back to my work."

"Have you been writing poetry this morning, father dear?" Leonard inquired urbanely.

He was now lolling against a writing-table of the first empire, where sheets of paper lay like fallen leaves among Japanese bronzes, old and elaborate candlesticks, grotesque letter-clips and paper-weights, quaint pottery, big seals, and spring flowers in slender Venetian glasses of many colors.

"I wrote three lines, and was interrupted four times," replied his sire, with bitter brevity.

"I think I'll write some poetry. I don't mind being interrupted. May I have your ink?"

"No, you may not!" roared the master of the house and of the inkpot of priceless china which Leonard had seized. "Now, be off to the nursery!"

"I won't touch anything. I am going to draw out of the window," said Leonard calmly.

He had practised the art of being troublesome to the verge of expulsion ever since he had had a whim of his own, and as skill-

fully as he played other games. He was seated among the cushions of the oriel window-seat (colored rays from coats-of-arms in the upper panes falling on his fair hair with a fanciful effect of canonizing him for his sudden goodness) almost before his father could reply.

"I advise you to stay there, and to keep quiet."

Lady Jane took up the broken thread of conversation in despair.

"Have you ever seen him?"

"Yes, years ago."

"You know I never saw either. Your sister was much older than you; wasn't she?"

"The shadows move so on the grass, and the elms have so many branches, I think I shall turn round and draw the fireplace," murmured Leonard.

"Ten years. You may be sure, if I had been grown up I should never have allowed the marriage. I cannot think what possessed my father—"

"I am doing the inscription! I can print old English. What does L diphthong Æ—T—U—S—mean?" said Leonard.

"It means joyful, contented, happy.—I was at Eton at the time. Disastrous ill-luck!"

"Are there any children?"

"One son. And to crown all, his regiment is at Asholt. Nice family party!"

"A young man! Has he been well brought up?"

"What does—"

"Will you hold your tongue, Leonard?—Is he likely to have been well brought up? However, he's 'in the Service,' as they say. I wish it didn't make one think of funkeys, what with the word Service, and the liveries (I mean uniforms), and the legs, and shoulders, and swagger, and tag-rags, and epaulettes, and the fatiguing alertness and attentiveness of 'men in the Service.'"

The master of the house spoke with the pettish accent of one who says what he does not mean, partly for lack of something better to do, and partly to avenge some inward vexation upon his hearers. He lounged languidly on a couch, but Lady Jane sat upright, and her eyes gave an unwonted flash. She came of an ancient Scottish race, that had shed its blood like water on many a battlefield, generations before the family of her English husband had become favorites at the Court of the Tudors.

"I have so many military belongings, both in the past and the present, that I have respect for the Service—"

He got up and patted her head and smiled.

"I beg your pardon, my child. *Et ego*"—and he looked at Uncle Rupert, who looked sadly back again; "but you must make allowances for me. Asholt camp has been a thorn in my side from the first. And now to have the barrack-master, and the youngest subaltern of a marching regiment—"

"He's our nephew, Rupert!"

"Mine—not yours. You've nothing to do with him, thank goodness!"

"Your people are my people. Now, do not worry yourself. Of course I shall call on your sister at once. Will they be here for some time?"

"Five years, you may depend. He's just the sort of man to wedge himself into a snug berth at Asholt. You're an angel, Jane; you always are. But fighting ancestors is one thing; a barrack-master brother-in-law is another."

"Has he done any fighting?"

"Oh, dear, yes! Benedicted like that Guy Fawkes General in the pawnbroker's window that Len was so charmed by. But, my dear, I assure you—"

"I only just want to know what S—O—R—T—E—M—E—A—means" Leonard hastily broke in. "I've done it all now, and shan't want to know anything more."

"*Sorte mea* is Latin for 'My fate,' or 'My lot in life.' '*Letus sorte mea*' means 'Happy in my lot.' It is our family motto. Now, if you ask another question, off you go! After all, Jane, you must allow it's about as hard lines as could be, to have a few ancestral acres and a nice old place in one of the quietest, quaintest corners of old England; and for Government to come and plant a Camp of Instruction, as they call it, and pour in tribes of savages in war-paint to build wigwams within a couple of miles of your lodge-gates!"

She laughed heartily.

"Dear Rupert! You are a born poet! You do magnify your woes so grandly. What was the brother-in-law like when you saw him?"

"Oh, the regular type. Hair cut like a pauper, or a convict" (the master of the house tossed his own locks as he spoke), "big, swaggering sort of fellow, swallowed the poker and not digested it, rather good features, acclimatized complexion, tight fit of red-hot cloth, and general pipeclay."

"Then he must be a sapper!" Leonard announced, as he advanced with a firm step and kindling eyes from the window. "Jemima's other brother is a gunner. He dresses in blue. But they both pipeclay their gloves, and I pipeclayed mine this morning, when she did the hearth. You've no idea how nasty they look while it's wet, but they dry as white as snow, only mine fell among the cinders. The sapper is very kind, both to her and to me. He gave her a brooch, and he is making me a wooden fort to put my cannon in. But the gunner is such a funny man! I said to him, 'Gunner, why do you wear white gloves?' and he said, 'Young gentleman, why does a miller wear a white hat?' He's very funny. But I think I like the tidy one best of all. He is so very beautiful, and I should think he must be very brave."

That Leonard was permitted to deliver himself of this speech without a check can only have been due to the paralyzing nature of the shock which it inflicted on his parents, and of which he himself was pleasantly unconscious. His whole soul was in the subject, and he spoke with a certain grace and directness of address, and with a clear and facile enunciation, which were among the child's most conspicuous marks of good breeding.

"This is nice!" said the master of the house between his teeth with a deepened scowl.

The air felt stormy, and Leonard began to coax. He laid his curls against his father's arm, and asked, "Did you ever see a tidy one, father dear? He is a very splendid sort of man."

"What nonsense are you talking? What do you mean by a tidy one?"

There was no mistake about the storm now; and Leonard began to feel helpless,

and, as usual in such circumstances, turned to Lady Jane.

"Mother told me!" he gasped.

The master of the house also turned to Lady Jane.

"Do you mean you have heard of this before?"

She shook her head, and he seized his son by the shoulder.

"If that woman has taught you to tell untruths—"

Lady Jane firmly interposed.

"Leonard never tells untruths, Rupert. Please don't frighten him into doing so. Now, Leonard, don't be foolish and cowardly. Tell mother quite bravely all about it. Perhaps she has forgotten."

(To be Continued.)

THE DULL BOY.

Be patient with your dull boy. Some minds are like Norwegian pines. They are slow in growth, but they strike their roots deep. Dryden and Smith were dull boys. So was Goldsmith; so was Gibbon; so was Sir Walter Scott. Isaac Barrow was so stupid in his early years that his father once said that if God took away any of his children he hoped it would be Isaac.

