

FLOTSAM.

By OWEN HALL, in Lippincott's.

BOOK II.

DRIFTING.

Chapter II. AT MORUYA STATION.

George wrote as soon as he heard of Charlie's arrival to insist on our paying a visit to the Station. Of course I was obliged then to write again and tell them all about Helen. I had grown quite accustomed to calling her Helen by that time, because, of course, we couldn't leave her behind, and it was impossible to take her without an explanation. Bridget, I knew, would have taken every care of her, for the good old soul had been attracted to her from the first moment she saw her, and after I had told her the story she couldn't do enough for her, for she remarked in her own way, "Sure and it's the blessed angels that do be looking through the innocent eyes av her, and it's herself will bring a blissin' to the house that shilters av her, glory be to God." I am sure I hoped so, but I confess that even then I felt uneasy when I saw the way Charlie's eyes followed her wherever she went. Not that I dreamed of Charlie being in love with her, you know, but these men are such creatures of habit. Only let a man—a good man, I mean of course—have to be constantly thinking about a girl that isn't altogether ugly, and you never know what will happen.

Well, I wrote and told Elsie about Helen, for although she is such a wild creature and has got such a sharp tongue, I always seem to know her better than either of the others, and I knew it would be well to interest her in Helen from the first. Of course I knew there was no need to ask George, for anything Elsie wanted she could get her father to want directly: so I only waited for Elsie's reply before starting. It was just like the child when it did come.

"DEAREST OLD AUNTIE,"—there was no date, of course,—"Bring along your pet lamb and his patient. We are all wild to see what that boy Charlie, who used always to grunt if I went near any of his dismembered cats and things in the days of my innocent childhood, has turned out now that he's a man. I wonder whether he'll grunt now if I venture near the latest substitute for the wooden-legged cat. Never mind, though; bring her on, for if it's only memory she wants I think I have enough for two. Has she red hair?—you don't mention it, but I have a presentiment,—one of yours, you know, auntie, that always came true. It does not matter if it is blue, the tint of the 'lone blue sea,' you know; we shall all be delighted to have her, and more than delighted to have you and Charlie. Come on Thursday, there's a dear, and I'll send papa to the station to meet you with Dander and Bounding-Boy in the drag; they're dying to run away with somebody again, for they haven't had a chance since he fetched the arch-deacon and Mrs. Taylor and had to go back three miles for the old lady's wig and found a sheep browsing on it. Do come, there's a darling. I shall send him on the chance.

"ELSIE"

Charlie insisted on seeing it to make certain Helen would be sure of a welcome from the girls. He knit his great brows as he read it, and then laughed. "The same madcap child as ever," he said. "Grunt, indeed? I should think I did grunt. Do you remember her dressing the lame cat in Bridget's best Sunday-go-to-meeting cap? She might do her good, though." I don't like to hear a man talk of "her," at least unless it is the particular one that is desirable. When a man talks of "her," or a girl of "him," it is generally dangerous. However, he was satisfied, and we went. I was born at Moruya, and I suppose it's natural only to I should like it, but to me the old home seems delightful.

I lived there until after my father died and George got married. As a girl I had dreamed dreams in the old in the old garden that sloped down to the creek, or sat under the shade of our great Moreton Bay fig-tree and seen the sun set in the golden haze over the plains as far as the eye could see to the west. I had ridden races with my father and with George, and joined in many a headlong burst after kangeroos, before I began to grow proper and life to grow gray. It seems long ago now, and yet, when I sat opposite to Elsie in the drag, and her face lighted up with a sort of glory of youth and spirits, as she chatted on about the hundred innocent delights of just such a life as had been my own, now so long ago, it

almost seemed as if for a moment it was mine again. I enjoyed it. I always enjoyed Elsie, even as at her most reckless, perhaps because she somehow reminded me of myself when I was young, before—but, ah, there is always a 'before' that marks the termination of youths golden age. I didn't take much notice of Helen, who sat beside me, though I do think Charlie watched her more closely than was quite necessary. Of course she was his patient, and no doubt, as he said, a very interesting one too, but I did think he might have taken just a little more interest in Elsie's bright, funny talk, instead of looking so serious, and keeping a watch over the corner of his eye, which of course any girl could see through at a single glance, on Helen's face.

I must say Elsie was just perfect. I don't mean in her appearance, though I will say that you won't meet with many prettier girls than Elsie anywhere, and when I took her to Government House last winter she made a sensation of which I was proud. But what I mean is in the way she acted about Helen. The was just as warm and friendly as could be, without making a fuss, and from her manner I would have defied any one to say whether she was a cousin of whom she hadn't seen a very great deal or not. She only looked at her now and then when she was talking to me, but when ever she had anything to point as we went long—and it was astonishing how much Elsie always had to show one—she was always doubly carefully to make Helen see it too. I felt sure there two girls would get on well together, long before Elsie rushed in to my room while I was taking off my things, and, throwing her hat on the bed, exclaimed, "Why, auntie, did you ever see such a face in your life? I don't wonder Charlie's as far gone as a sick owl." "Nonsense, my dear!" I said, more annoyed than I could say at her rapid conclusion, for I knew how sharp the child was. "Nonsense! Really, Elsie, you grow worse and worse, letting your tongue run away with you. She's only his patient. That's only a way these doctors have of watching anything they are much interested in." Elsie laughed long and merrily. "Oh, auntie, auntie, keep that for some old stupid like papa. But, mind you, I don't blame him one bit; he would be a stupid if he didn't, doctor or not. Why, if I were a man,—and do you know, auntie, I feel as if a great injustice had been done me that that I wasn't,—I'd—why, I'd do anything to make a girl like that love me. Just fancy those eyes, if she once really cared about a person.

It was never any use finding fault with Elsie, I knew, and was only too glad to see that she seemed so ready to take to her visitor. Indeed, they all were that, from George, who appeared at first just a little afraid of her, as if she might break,—George is one of these fine, big, powerful men who are always like that when they come in contact with anything weak or unfortunate,—to Kitty, who seemed to worship her when she was there, and used to cry when ever she thought of her friends, perhaps her mother or lover breaking their hearts for her loss. I confess I was unreasonably annoyed with the child when she made that last suggestion to me one day after we had been at Moruya a fortnight. Of course it was absurd, but, to tell the truth, I was beginning to think it was no use shutting one's eye to the chance of Charlie falling in love with the girl. Of course it was in the least degree undesirable on nearly every account,—and, besides, I had thought—but that doesn't matter now; but if Charlie should, it would be terrible for anything like that to turn up afterwards. And yet, as Elsie said, how could one blame him if he did? Everybody knows what men are about a pretty face especially if it goes with a good figure, and there was no denying that Helen—of course we all called her Helen, and the girl never seemed to doubt that it was her name—had both of these. And then there was the romance of the thing. Every man that is worth his salt likes a spice of romance, and here was enough of it, in all conscience. No, fond as I had already grown of the girl, I confess I didn't like it at all; but I began to think it was only too likely.

Being at Moruya had done her an immense amount of good already. It was strange to see the way in which she began to take interest in one thing after another, and stranger to watch the wonder with which she discovered that she could do things that others did, such as fancy-work of some kind. Other things, again, didn't seem to surprise her at all. The first time the girls' horses were brought we were all curious to see what she would say, and we were certainly surprised when she exclaimed, "Oh, what pretty horses! How I would enjoy a ride again!" I

quite started, for I thought surely memory was coming back, but she only looked at me with such a sad, wistful expression of appeal to her eyes that I could have cried. After that, however, she rode everyday with the girls and Charlie, and every day it seemed to me there was some subtle change coming over her. The strange partition-wall that had seemed to stand between her and other people, the strange childlike expression of her face, although both were still there in a degree, seemed to be changing their character. She was still apart from us in many ways, but somehow it appeared more like a gentle reserve and less like ignorance. Her face was still strangely innocent, but the look of puzzled wonder showed itself less and less often.

If she could have been spoiled I think we should have spoiled her, she was such a favorite with all the household. My brother petted her with his big, hearty, good natured way; the girls quarrelled among themselves who should have the most of her company; even the stockman on the Run would make an excuse to come across the party on their rides to get a sight of her glowing face with the large child's eyes and the wonderful golden-brown hair. As for Charlie, he was a little uncertain, I thought. Sometimes he seemed hardly able to keep his eyes away from the girl; at other times he would seem almost anxious to pay more attention to the others, especially Elsie. As for Elsie, I had never seen the child wilder or more charming. She found endless interest, apparently, in being with Helen, but she took unlimited amusement out of her battles with Charlie whenever he could be induced to engage in one, while Helen would look on with a quiet though often a puzzled smile. For my part, I watched it all and hardly knew what to think; but one thing was very certain, I was growing fonder of that poor child day by day, and day by day more anxious about her future.

Was she growing fond of Charlie? I asked myself the question again and again. Was she capable of being fond of any one in that way? Sometimes I thought not, and then again I doubted. When I looked at those eyes of hers, that always seemed to come back to mine with that pathetic look of unconscious appeal when ever anything puzzled her. I felt quite inclined to be angry that anyone should be guilty of joining even their thoughts with the idea of love-making. But then, again, when I saw how she turned to and seemed to rely upon Charlie in so many ways, and how her eyes would sometimes follow and rest upon him with an interested though half-wondering look in them as he was laughing and battling with Elsie, I couldn't make my mind up. Of course in any other way there could be no doubt. So far as appearance went, she was just the girl to turn men's heads. Every day she seemed to me to grow handsomer, as her young figure filled out and rounded off into the more perfect lines of young womanhood, and her face, if it could be improved at all, seemed to me to be growing prettier—no, not that, but rather more beautiful, day by day, as a more natural expression came back to it.

I watched her so anxiously, yet hardly so anxiously, after all, as I did Charlie. After all, he was my boy; except Elsie, and of course the others, he seemed to be nearly my only interest in life, his future seemed everything to me. Of course I had planned that he should settle in Sydney, and I knew that as a doctor he ought to have a nice wife;—a wife to suit him, and, if possible, to suit me too. I hadn't gone much beyond that in my dreams while I was waiting for the ships arrival; but perhaps I had just a little. It is so natural to fancy what one would like best one's self in these cases, I think, and then it did seem so natural that he should like what I liked. There would be so many ways of bringing them together, and, besides there would be old memories of companionship. Yes, I almost think I had built up plans for him to suit myself; and now—now, I really didn't know what to think, and hardly what to wish. Again and again I asked myself the question, was Charlie in love? He hadn't known her long, but that goes as nothing. Men's love is like measles in a family; some take it at once, and these very often get over it the first, and others sicken for it ever so long, and they are generally the worst cases. I couldn't be sure about Charlie, partly because he kept his feelings so much to himself, and partly, I suppose, because he had been so long away.

We stayed nearly two months at the Station. There was really no reason why we should hurry away, and George would have been offended if we had talked of leaving much sooner. As for the young people, it caused such an outcry when I hinted at going the first

month, that I didn't venture upon the subject again for weeks. I must confess that latterly I didn't have a very happy time. I seemed every day to be growing more puzzled and more anxious. Sometimes I was afraid of Charlie, and at other times I worked myself in to a state of indignation at the thought that perhaps he didn't really mean anything more than just a scientific interest in my poor child—and how was she to know that? And then, again, I sometimes had uncomfortable twinges about Elsie. The girl's spirits were something wonderful, and she was the very life and soul of the party, but at times I fancied she was just a little dull and that her fun was an effort to her. Ah, I'm afraid, after all, that I shall grow into a worrying, meddling old maiden aunt, if I don't take care,—one of the most unhappy and really useless of human beings.

At last we went home. I couldn't leave the house for ever to itself and Bridget, and I felt sure as it was I should have to dismiss the cook, who was certain to be spoiled by all this idleness. Besides, it was time that Charlie were looking about him and making up his mind what he was going to do. As for Helen, I thought, and Charlie said too, that the change to town would very likely do her good, and if any inquiries were made about her we should be more in the way of them there. At the last I pressed Elsie to come with us. At first she seemed to like the idea, but afterwards she changed her mind and said perhaps she would come later. So our visit to the Station came to an end, and we found ourselves in Sydney once more.

(To be Continued.)

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THE CANADIAN NORTHWEST.

HOMESTEAD REGULATIONS.

All even-numbered sections of Dominion Lands in Manitoba or the Northwest Territories, except 8 and 26, which have not been homesteaded, reserved to provide wood lots for settlers, or for other purposes may be homesteaded by any person who is sole head of a family, or any male over eighteen years of age to the extent of one quarter-section of 160 acres, more or less.

ENTRY.

Entry may be made personally at the local office for the District in which the land to be taken is situate, or if the homesteader desires he may, on application to the Minister of the Interior, Ottawa, or the Commissioner of Dominion Lands, Winnipeg, receive authority for some one to make the entry for him. A fee of \$10 is charged for an ordinary homestead entry; but for lands which have been occupied an additional fee of \$10 is chargeable to meet inspection and cancellation charges.

HOMESTEAD DUTIES.

Under the present law homestead duties must be performed in the following way, namely, by three years' cultivation and residence, during which the settler may not be absent more than six months in any one year without forfeiting the entry.

APPLICATION FOR PATENT

May be made at the end of three years, before the local agent, or the homestead inspector. Before making application for patent the settler must give six months' notice in writing to the Commissioner of Dominion Lands of his intention to do so. When, for convenience of the settler, application for patent is made before a homestead inspector, a fee of \$5 is chargeable.

INFORMATION.

Newly arrived immigrants will receive at any Dominion Lands Office in Manitoba or the Northwest Territories information as to the lands that are open for entry, and from the officers in charge, free of expense, advice and assistance in securing lands to suit them; and full information respecting the land, timber, coal and mineral laws, and copies of these Regulations, as well as those respecting Dominion Lands in the Railway Belt in British Columbia, may be obtained upon application to the Secretary of the Department of the Interior (Immigration Branch) Ottawa; the Commissioner of Dominion Lands, Winnipeg, Manitoba; or to any of the Dominion Lands Agents in Manitoba or the Northwest Territories.

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