

CHOICE LITERATURE.

A DAY OF FATE.

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BOOK FIRST—CHAPTER V.—MUTUAL DISCOVERIES.

I must have slept for an hour or more, for when I awoke I saw through the window-lattice that the sun was declining in the west. Sleep had again proved better than all philosophy or medicine, for it had refreshed me and given something of the morning's elasticity.

I naturally indulged in a brief retrospect, conscious that while nothing had happened, since the croaking printer's remark, that I would care to print in the paper, experiences had occurred that touched me closer than would the news that all the Malays of Asia were running amuck. I felt as if thrown back on to my old life and work in precisely their old form. My expedition into the country and romance had been disappointing. It is true I had found rest and sleep, and for these I was grateful, "and with these staunch allies I can go on with my work, which I now believe is the best thing the world has for me. I shall go back to it to-morrow, well content, after this day's experience, to make it my mistress. The bare possibility of being yoked to such a woman as in fancy I have wooed and won to-day makes me shiver with inexpressible dread. Her obtuseness, combined with her microscopic surveillance, would drive me to the nearest madhouse I could find. The whole business of love-making and marriage involves too much risk to a man who, like myself, must use his wits as a sword to carve his fortunes. I've fought my way up alone so far, and may as well remain a free lance. The wealthy, and those who are content to plod, can go through life with a woman hanging on their arm. Rich I shall never be, and I'll die before I'll plod. My place is in the midst of the world's arena, where the forces that shall make the future are contending, and I propose to be an appreciable part of those forces. I shall go back the wiser and stronger for this day's folly, and infinitely better for its rest," and I marched down the moody stairway, feeling that I was not yet a crushed and broken man, and cherishing also a secret complacency that I had at last outgrown my leanings towards sentimentality.

As I approached the door of the wide, low-browed parlour, I saw Miss Warren reading a paper; a second later and my heart gave a bound; it was the journal of which I was the night-editor, and I greeted its familiar aspect as the face of an old friend in a foreign land. It was undoubtedly the number that had gone to press the night I had broken down, and I almost hoped to see some marks of the catastrophe in its columns. How could I beguile the coveted sheet from Miss Warren's hands and steal away to a half-hour's seclusion?

"What! Miss Warren," I exclaimed, "reading a newspaper on Sunday?"

She looked at me a moment before replying, and then asked,

"Do you believe in a Providence?"

Thrown off my guard by the unexpected question, I answered,

"Assuredly; I am not quite ready to admit that I am a fool, even after all that has happened."

There was laughter in her eyes at once, but she asked innocently,

"What has happened?"

I suppose my colour rose a little, but I replied carelessly, "I have made some heavy blunders of late. You are adroit in stealing away from a weak position under a fire of questions, but your stratagem shall not succeed," I continued severely. "How can you explain the fact, too patent to be concealed, that here in good Mrs. Yocomb's house, and on a Sunday afternoon, you are reading a secular newspaper?"

"You have explained my conduct yourself," she said, assuming a fine surprise.

"I?"

"You, and most satisfactorily. You said you believed in a Providence. I have merely been reading what He has done, or what He has permitted within the last twenty-four hours."

I looked around for a chair and sat down "struck all of a heap," as the rural vernacular has it.

"Is that your definition of news?" I ventured at last.

"I'm not a dictionary. That's the definition of what I've been reading this afternoon."

"Miss Warren, you may score one against me."

The mischievous light was in her eyes, but she said suavely,

"Oh, no, you shall have another chance. I shall begin by shewing mercy, for I may need it, and I see that you can be severe."

"Well, please, let me take breath and rally my shattered wits before I make another advance. I understand you, then, that you regard newspapers as good Sunday reading?"

"You prove your ability, Mr. Morton, by drawing a vast conclusion from a small and ill-defined premise. I don't recall making any such statement."

"Pardon me, you are at disadvantage now. I ask for no better premise than your own action; for you are one, I think, who would do only what you thought right."

"A palpable hit. I'm glad I shewed you mercy. Still it does not follow that because I read a newspaper, all newspapers are good Sunday reading. Indeed, there is much in this paper that is not good reading for Monday or any other day."

"Ah!" I exclaimed, looking grave, "then why do you read it?"

"I have not. A newspaper is like the world of which it is a brief record—full of good and evil. In either case, if one does not like the evil, it can be left alone."

"Which do you think predominates in that paper?"

"Oh, the good, in the main. There is an abundance of evil, too, but it is rather in the frank and undisguised record of the evil in the world. It does not seem to have got into the paper's blood and poisoned its whole life. It is easily

skipped if one is so inclined. There are some journals in which the evil cannot be skipped. From the leading editorial to the obscurest advertisement, one 'umbles on it everywhere. They are like certain regions in the South, in which there is no escape from the snakes and malaria. Now there are low places in this paper, but there is high ground also, where the air is good and wholesome, and where the outlook on the world is wide. That is the reason I take it."

"I was not aware that many young ladies looked, in journals of this character, beyond the record of deaths and marriages."

"We studied ancient history. Is it odd that we should have a faint desire to know what Americans are doing, as well as what the Babylonians did?"

"Oh, I do not decry your course as irrational. It seems rather—rather—"

"Rather too rational for a young lady."

"I did not say that; but here is my excuse," and I took from a table near, a periodical entitled "The Young Lady's Own Weekly," addressed to Miss Adah Yocomb.

"Have not young men their own weeklies also—which of the two classes are the more weakly?"

"Ahem! I decline to pursue this phase of the subject any further. To return to our premise, this journal," and I laid my hand on the old paper carelessly. "It so happens that I read it also, and thus learn that we have had many thoughts in common; though, no doubt, we would differ on some of the questions discussed in it. What do you think of its politics?"

"I think they are often very bad."

"That's delightfully frank," I said, sitting back in my chair a little stiffly. "I think they are very good—at any rate they are mine."

"Perhaps that is the reason they are so good?"

"Now, pardon me if I, too, am a trifle plain. Do you consider yourself as competent to form an opinion concerning politics as gray-headed students of flairs?"

"Oh, certainly not; but do I understand that you accept, unquestioningly, the politics of the paper you read?"

"Far from it; rather that the politics of this paper commend themselves to my judgment."

"And you think 'judgment' an article not among a young woman's possessions?"

"Miss Warren, you may think what you please of the politics of this paper. But how comes it that you think about them at all? I'm sure that they interest but comparatively few young ladies."

Her face suddenly became very grave and sad, and a moment later she turned away her eyes that were full of tears. "I wish you hadn't asked that question; but I will explain my seeming weakness," she said, in a low faltering voice. "I lost my only brother in the war—I was scarcely more than a child; but I can see him now—my very ideal of brave, loyal manhood. Should I not love the country for which he died?"

"Politics! a word that men so often utter with contempt, has been hallowed to me since that moment."

She looked away for a moment, swiftly pressed her handkerchief to her eyes, then turning toward me said, with a smile, and in her former tones,

"Forgive me! I've been a bit lonely and blue this afternoon, for the day has reminded me of the past. I won't be weak and womanish any more. I think some political questions interest a great many women deeply. It must be so. We don't dote on scrambling politicians; but a man as a true statesman makes a grand figure."

I was not thinking of statecraft or the craftsmen.

"Surely," I exclaimed mentally, "this girl is more beautiful than my 'perfect flower of womanhood.' Night-owl that I am, I am just gaining the power to see her clearly as the sun declines."

I know that my face was full of honest sympathy as I said, gently and reverently,

"Tell me more of your brother. The thoughts of such men make me better."

She shot a quick, grateful glance, looked down, trembled, shook her head, as she faltered,

"I cannot—please don't; speak of something far removed."

The feeling was so deep, and yet so strongly curbed, that its repression affected me more deeply than could its manifestation. Her sorrow became a veiled and sacred mystery of which I could never be wholly unconscious again; and I felt that however strong and brilliant she might prove in our subsequent talk, I should ever see, back of all, the tender-hearted, sensitive woman.

"Please forgive me. I was cruelly thoughtless," I said, in a voice that trembled lightly. Then, catching up the paper, I continued, with attempted lightness, "We have found this journal, that we mutually read, a fruitful 'emc. What do you think of its literary review?"

Mirth and tears struggled for the mastery in her eyes; but she answered, with a voice that had regained its clear, bell-like tone,

"In some I have seen indisputable proof of impartiality and freedom from prejudice."

"In what did that proof consist?"

"In the evident fact that the reviewer had not read the book."

"You are severe," I said, colouring slightly.

She looked at me with a little surprise, but continued,

"That does not happen very often. It is clear that there are several contributors to this department, and I have come to look for the opinions of one of them with much interest. I am sure of a careful and appreciative estimate of a book from his point of view. His one fault appears to be that he sees everything from one perspective, and does not realize that the same thing may strike other intelligent people very differently. But he's a fixed and certain quantity, and a good point to measure from. I like him because he is so sincere. He sits down to a book as a true scientist does to a phase of nature, to really learn what there is in it, and not merely to display a little learning, sarcasm, or smartness. I always feel sure that I know something about a book after reading one of his reviews, and also whether I could afford to spend a part of my limited time in reading it."

"I have singled out the same reviewer, and think your estimate correct. On another occasion, when we have more time, I am going to ask how you like the musical critic's opinions; for on that subject you would be at home."

"What makes you think so?"

"Miss Yocomb told me that you taught music in the city, and music is about the only form of recreation for which I have taken time in my busy life. There are many things concerning the musical tendencies of the day that I would like to ask you about. But I hear the clatter of the supper dishes. What do you think of the editorial page, and its moral tendencies? That is a good Sunday theme."

"There is evidence of much ability, but there is a lack of earnestness and definite purpose. The paper is newswy and bright, and, in the main, wholesome. It reflects public opinion fairly and honestly, but does little to shape it. It is often spicily controversial, sometimes tiresomely so. I do a good deal of skipping in that line. I wish its quarrels resulted more from efforts to right some wrong; and there is so much evil in our city, both in high and low places, that ought to be fought to the death. The editor has exceptional opportunities, and might be the knight-errant of our age. If in earnest, and on the right side, he can forge a weapon out of public opinion that few evils could resist. And he is in just the position to discover these dragons, and drive them from their hiding-places. If, for instance, the clever paragraphist in this column, whose province, it seems, is to comment at the last moment on the events of the day, were as desirous of saying true, strong, earnest words, as bright and prophetic ones, in which the news of the morrow is also outlined—why, Mr. Morton, what is the matter?"

"Are you a witch?"

She looked at me a moment, blushed deeply, and asked hesitatingly,

"Are—are you the paragraphist?"

"Yes," I said, with a burst of laughter, "as truly as yours is the only witchcraft in which I believe—that of brains." Then putting my finger on my lips, I added *sotto voce*, "Don't betray me. Mr. Yocomb would set all his dogs on me if he knew I were an editor, and I don't wish to go yet."

"What have I been saying!" she exclaimed with an appalled look.

"Lots of clever things. I never got so many good hints in the same time before."

"It wasn't fair in you, to lead me on in the dark."

"Oh, there wasn't any 'dark,' I assure you. Your words were coruscations. Never was the old journal so lighted up before."

There were both perplexity and annoyance in her face as she looked dubiously at me. Instantly becoming grave, I stepped to her side and took her hand, as I said, with the strongest emphasis,

"Miss Warren, I thank you. I have caught a glimpse of my work and calling through the eyes of a true, refined, and permit me to add, a gifted woman. I think I shall be the better for it, but will make no professions. If I'm capable of improvement this column will shew it."

Her hand trembled in mine as she looked away and said,

"You are capable of sympathy."

Then she went hastily to the piano.

Before she could play beyond a bar or two, little Zillah bounded in, exclaiming,

"Emily Warren, mother asks if thee and Richard Morton will come out to tea?"

"I may be in error, but is not a piano one of the worldly vanities?" I asked, as she turned to comply. "I did not expect to see one here."

Mrs. Yocomb kindly took this in with me. I could scarcely live without one, so you see I carry the shop with me everywhere, and am so linked to my business that I can never be above it."

"I hope not, but you carry the business up with you. The shop may be, and ought to be thoroughly respectable. It is the narrow, mercenary spirit of the shop that is detestable. If you had that, you would leave your piano in New York, since here it would have no money value."

"You take a nice view of it."

"Is it not the true view?"

In mock surprise she answered,

"Mr. Morton, I'm from New York. Did you ever meet a lady from that city who was not all that the poets claimed for womanhood?"

CHAPTER VI.—A QUAKER TEA.

"Richard Morton," said Mrs. Yocomb genially, "these seems listening very intently to something Emily Warren is saying, so thee may take that seat beside her."

"Richard Morton," said Mr. Yocomb from the head of the table, "has thee made the acquaintance of Emily Warren?"

"No, sir, but I am making it."

"So am I, and she has been here a week."

"I should esteem that one of the highest of compliments," I said; then turning to her, I added, in an aside, "you found me out in half an hour."

"Am I such a sphinx?" she asked Mr. Yocomb with a smile; while to me she said, in a low tone, "You are mistaken. You have had something to say to me almost daily for a year or more."

"I am not acquainted with the article, and so can't give an opinion," Mr. Yocomb replied, with a humorous twinkle in his eye. "If the resemblance is close, so much the better for the sphinxes."

"Now, father, thee isn't a young man that thee should be complimenting the girls," his wife remarked.

"I've persuaded Silas Jones to stay," said Adah, entering.

"Silas Jones, I hope thee and thy parents are well," Mrs. Yocomb answered, with a courtesy somewhat constrained. "Will thee take that seat by Adah? Let me make thee acquainted with Richard Morton and Emily Warren."

We bowed, but I turned instantly to Miss Warren and said,

"Do you note how delightfully Mrs. Yocomb unites our names? I take it as an omen that we may become friends