

CHOICE LITERATURE.

A DAY OF FATE.

BY REV. E. P. ROSE.

CHAPTER VIII.—AN IMPULSE.

For nearly an hour I sat listlessly in my chair and watched the shadows lengthen across the valley. Suddenly an impulse seized me, and I resolved to obey it.

"If I can go down-stairs to-morrow, I can go just as well to-night," I said, "and go I will. She shall not have a shadow on her first evening with her lover, and she's too good-hearted to enjoy it wholly if she thinks I'm moping and sighing in my room. Moreover, I shall not let my shadows make a back-ground for the banker's general prosperity. Stately and patronizing he cannot help being, and Miss Warren may lead him to think that he is under some obligation to me—I wish he might never hear of it—but, by Vulcan and his sledge! he shall have no cause to pity me while he unctuously rubs his hands in self-felicitation."

As far as my strength permitted, I made a careful toilet, and sat down to wait. As the sun sank below the horizon the banker appeared. "Very appropriate," I muttered; "but his presence would make it dark at midday."

Miss Warren was talking with animation, and pointing out the surrounding objects of interest, and he was listening with a wonderfully complacent smile on his smooth, full face.

"How prosperous he looks!" I muttered. "The idea of anything going contrary to his will or wishes!"

Then I saw that a little girl sat on the front seat with Reuben, and that he was letting her drive, but with his hand hovering near the reins.

Mr. and Mrs. Yocomb came out and greeted Mr. Hearn cordially, and he in return was very benign, for it was evident that, in their place and station, he found them agreeable people, and quite to his mind.

"Why doesn't he take off his hat to Mrs. Yocomb as if she were a duchess?" I growled. "That trunk that fills half the rockaway doesn't look as if he had come to spend Sunday only. Perhaps we are destined to make a happy family. I wonder who the little girl is?"

The banker was given what was known as the parlour bedroom, on the ground floor, and I heard Adah taking the little girl to her room.

Miss Warren did not glance at my window on her return. "She would have been happy enough had I remained here and sighed like a furnace," I muttered grimly. "Well, idiot! why shouldn't she be?"

She had evidently lingered to say something to Mrs. Yocomb, but I soon heard her light step pass up to her room.

"Now's my chance," I thought. "Mrs. Yocomb is preparing for supper, and all the rest are out of the way," and I slipped down the stairs with noiseless and rather unsteady tread. Excitement, however, lent me a transient strength, and I felt as if the presence of the banker would give me sinews of steel. I entered the parlour unobserved, and taking my old seat, from which I had watched the approach of the memorable storm, I waited events.

The first one to appear was the banker, rubbing his hands in a way that suggested a habit of complacency and self-felicitation. He started slightly on seeing me, and then said graciously,

"Mr. Morton, I presume?"

"You are correct, Mr. Hearn. I congratulate you on your safe arrival."

"Thanks. I've travelled considerably, and have never met with an accident. Glad to see you able to be down, for what I heard I feared you had not sufficiently recovered."

"I'm much better to-day, sir," I replied briefly.

"Well, this air, these scenes ought to impart health and content. I'm greatly pleased already, and congratulate myself on finding so pleasant a place of summer sojourn. It will form a delightful contrast to great hotels and jostling crowds."

I now saw Miss Warren, through the half-open door, talking to Mrs. Yocomb. They evidently thought the banker was conversing with Mr. Yocomb.

Instead of youthful ardour and bubbling happiness, the girl's face had a grave, sedate aspect that comported well with her coming dignities. Then she looked distressed. Was Mrs. Yocomb telling her of my profane and awful mood? I lent an inattentive ear to Mr. Hearn's excellent reasons for satisfaction with his present abode, and in the depths of my soul I thought, "If she's worrying about me now, how good-hearted she is!"

"I already foresee," Mr. Hearn proceeded, in his full-orbed tones, "that it will also be just the place for my little girl—safe and quiet, with very nice people to associate with."

"Yes," I said emphatically, "they are nice people—the best I ever knew."

Miss Warren started violently, took a step toward the door, then paused, and Mrs. Yocomb entered first.

"Why, Richard Morton!" she exclaimed, "what does thee mean by this imprudence?"

"I mean to eat a supper that will astonish you," I replied, laughing.

"But I didn't give thee leave to come down."

"You said I could come to-morrow, so I haven't disobeyed in spirit."

Miss Warren still stood in the hall, but seeing that I had recognized her, she came forward and gave me her hand as she said,

"No one is more glad than I that you are able to come down."

Her words were very quiet, but the pressure of her hand was so warm as to surprise me, and I also noted that what must have been a vivid colour was fading from her usually pale face. I saw, too, that Mr. Hearn was watching us keenly.

"Oh, but you are shrewd!" I thought. "I wish you had cause to suspect."

I returned her greeting with great apparent frankness and cordiality as I replied, "Oh, I'm much better to-night, and as jolly as Mark Tapley."

"Well," ejaculated Mrs. Yocomb, "thee has stolen a march on us, but I'm afraid thee'll be the worse for it."

"Ah, Mrs. Yocomb," I laughed, "your captive has escaped. I'm going to meeting with you to-morrow."

"No thee isn't. I feel as if I ought to take thee right back to thy room."

"Mr. Yocomb," I cried to the old gentleman, who now stood staring at me in the doorway, "I appeal to you. Can't I stay down to supper?"

"How's this! how's this!" he exclaimed. "We were going to give thee a grand ovation to-morrow, and mother had planned a dinner that might content an alderman."

"Or a banker," I thought, as I glanced at Mr. Hearn's ample waistcoat; but I leaned back in my chair and laughed heartily as I said,

"You cannot get me back to my room, Mrs. Yocomb, now that I know I've escaped an ovation. I'd rather have a toothache."

"But does thee really feel strong enough?"

"Oh, yes; I never felt better in my life."

"I don't know what to make of thee," she said, with a puzzled look.

"No," I replied; "you little knew what a case I was when you took me in hand."

"I'll stand up for thee, Friend Morton. Thee shall stay down to supper, and have what thee pleases. Thee may as well give in, mother; he's out from under thy thumb."

"My dear sir, you talk as if you were out too. I fear our mutiny may go too far. To-morrow is Sunday, Mrs. Yocomb, and I'll be as good as I know how all day, which, after all, is not promising much."

"It must be very delightful to you to have secured such good friends," began Mr. Hearn, who perhaps felt that he had stood too long in the background. "I congratulate you. At the same time, Mr. and Mrs. Yocomb," with a courtly bend toward them, "I do not wonder at your feelings, for Emily has told me that Mr. Morton behaved very handsomely during that occasion of peril."

"Did I?" I remarked, with a wry face. "I was under the impression that I looked very ridiculous," and I turned a quick, mischievous glance toward Miss Warren, who seemed well content to remain in the background.

"Yes," she said, laughing, "your appearance did not comport with your deeds."

"I'm not so sure about that," I replied dryly. "At any rate, I much prefer the present to reminiscences."

"I trust that you will permit me, as one of the most interested parties, to thank you also," began Mr. Hearn impressively.

"No, indeed, sir," I exclaimed, a little brusquely. "Thanks do not agree with my constitution at all."

"Hurrah!" cried Reuben, looking in at the parlour window.

"Yes, here's the man to thank," I resumed. "Even after being struck by lightning he was equal to the emergency."

"No thee don't, Richard," laughed Reuben. "Thee needn't think thee's going to palm that thing off on me. We've all come to our senses now."

For some reason Miss Warren laughed heartily, and then said to me, "You look so well and genial to-night that I do begin to think it was some other tramp."

"I fear I'm the same old tramp; for, as Reuben says, we have all come to our senses."

"Thee didn't lose thy senses, Richard, till after thee was sick. 'Twas mighty lucky thee wasn't struck," explained the matter-of-fact Reuben.

"You must permit me to echo the young lad's sentiment," said Mr. Hearn feelingly. "It was really a providence that you escaped, and kept such a cool, clear head."

I fear I made another very wry face as I looked out of the window.

Reuben evidently had not liked the term "young lad," but as he saw my expression he burst out laughing as he said,

"What's the matter, Richard? I guess thee thinks thee had the worst of it, after all."

"So thee has," broke out Mr. Yocomb. "Thee didn't know what an awful scrape I was getting thee into when I brought thee home from meeting. Never was a stranger so taken in before. I don't believe thee'll ever go to friends' meeting again," and the old gentleman laughed heartily, but tears stood in his eyes.

In spite of myself my colour was rising, and I saw that Mrs. Yocomb and Miss Warren looked uncomfortably conscious of what must be in my mind; but I joined in his laugh as I replied,

"You are mistaken. Had I a prophet's eye, I would have come home with you. The kindness received in this home has repaid me a thousand times. With a sick bear on their hands, Mrs. Yocomb and Miss Adah were in a worse scrape than I."

"Well, thee hasn't growled as much as I expected," laughed Mrs. Yocomb; "and now thee's a very amiable bear indeed, and shall have thy supper at once," and she turned to depart, smiling to herself, but met in the doorway Adah and the little stranger—a girl about the same age as Zillah, with large, vivid black eyes, and long dark hair. Zillah was following her timidly, with a face full of intense interest in her new companion; but the moment she saw me she ran and sprang into my arms, and, forgetful of all others, cried gladly,

"Oh, I'm so glad—I'm so glad thee's well!"

The impulse must have been strong to make so shy a child forget the presence of strangers.

I whispered in her ear, "I told you that your kiss would make me well."

"Yes; but thee said Emily Warren's roses too," protested the little girl.

"Did I?" I replied, laughing. "Well, there's no escaping the truth in this house."

I dared not look at Miss Warren, but saw that Mr. Hearn's eyes were on her.

"Confound him?" I thought. "Can he be fool enough to be jealous?"

Adah still stood hesitatingly in the doorway, as if she dared not trust herself to enter. I put Zillah down, and crossing the room in a free, frank manner, I took her hand cordially as I said,

"Miss Adah, I must thank you next to Mrs. Yocomb that I am able to be down this evening, and that I am getting well so fast. You have been the best of nurses, and just as kind and considerate as a sister. I'm going to have the honour of taking you out to supper." I placed her hand on my arm, and its thrill and tremble touched my soul. In my thoughts I said, "It's all a wretched muddle, and, as the banker said, mysterious enough to be a providence;" but at that moment the ways of Providence seemed very bright to the young girl, and she saw Mr. Hearn escorting Miss Warren with undisguised complacency.

As the latter took her seat I ventured to look at her, and if ever a woman's eyes were eloquent with warm, approving friendliness, hers were. I seemingly had done the very thing she would have wished me to do. As we bowed our heads in grace, I was graceless enough to growl, under my breath, "My attentions to Adah are evidently very satisfactory. Can she imagine for a moment—does she take me for a weather-vane?"

When grace was over, I glanced toward her again, a trifle indignantly; but her face now was quiet and pale, and I was compelled to believe that for the rest of the evening she avoided my eyes and all references to the past.

"Why, mother!" exclaimed Mr. Yocomb from the head of the table, "thy cheeks are as red—why, thee looks like a young girl."

"Thee knows I'm very much pleased to-night," she said. "Does thee remember, Richard, when thee first sat down to supper with us?"

"Indeed I do. Never shall I forget my trepidation lest Mr. Yocomb should discover whom, in his unsuspecting hospitality, he was harbouring."

"Well, I've discovered," laughed the old gentleman. "Good is always coming out of Nazareth."

"It seems to me that we've met before," remarked Mr. Hearn graciously and reflectively.

"Yes, sir," I exclaimed. "As a reporter I called on you once or twice for information."

"Ah, now it comes back to me. Yes, yes, I remember; and I also remember that you did not extract the information, as if it had been a tooth. Your manner was not that of a professional interviewer. You must meet with disagreeable experiences in your calling."

"Yes, sir; but perhaps that is true of all callings."

"Yes, no doubt, no doubt; but it has seemed to me that a reporter's lot must frequently bring him in contact with much that is disagreeable."

"Mr. Morton is not a reporter," said Adah, a trifle indignantly; "he's the editor of a first-class newspaper."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Hearn, growing much more benign; "why, Emily, you did not tell me that."

"No, I only spoke of Mr. Morton as a gentleman."

"I imagine that Miss Warren thinks that I have mistaken my calling, and that I ought to be a gardener."

"That's an odd impression. Mr. Yocomb would not even trust you to weed," she retorted quickly.

"I have a fellow feeling for weeds; they grow so easily and naturally. But I must correct your impressions, Miss Adah. I'm not the dignitary you imagine—only an editor, and an obscure night one at that."

"Your night work on one occasion bears the light very well. I hope it may be the earnest of the future," said Mr. Hearn impressively.

I felt that he had a covert meaning, for he had glanced more than once at Miss Warren when I spoke, and I imagined him a little anxious as to our mutual impressions.

"I feel it my duty to set you right also, Mr. Hearn," I replied, with quiet emphasis, for I wished to end all further reference to that occasion. "Through Mr. and Mrs. Yocomb's kindness, I happened to be an inmate of the farmhouse that night. I merely did what any man would have done, and could have done just as well. My action involved no personal peril, and no hardship worth naming. My illness resulted from my own folly. I'd been overworking or overworked, as so many in my calling are. Conscious that I am not in the least heroic, I do not wish to be imagined a hero. Mrs. Yocomb knows what a bear I've been," I concluded, with a humorous nod toward her.

"Yes, I know, Richard," she said, quietly smiling.

"After this statement in prose, Mr. Hearn, you will not be led to expect more from me than from any ordinary mortal."

"Indeed, sir, I like your modesty, your self-depreciation."

"I beg your pardon," I interrupted a little decisively; "I hope you do not think my words had any leaning toward affectation. I wished to state the actual truth. My friends here have become too kind and partial to give a correct impression."

Mr. Hearn waved his hand very benignly, and his smile was graciousness itself as he said,

"I think I understand you, sir, and respect your sincerity. I've been led to believe that you cherish a high and scrupulous sense of honour, and that trait counts with me far more than all others."

I understood him well. "Oh, you are shrewd!" I thought; "but I'd like to know what obligations I'm under to you?" I merely bowed a trifle coldly to this tribute and suggestive statement, and turned the conversation. As I swept my eyes around the table a little later, I thought Miss Warren looked paler than usual.

"Does she understand his precautionary measures?" I thought. "He'd better beware—she would not endure distrust."

(To be continued.)