

THE WINSTALLS A TALE OF LOVE AND MONEY

OF
NEW YORK

BY
REV. JOSEPH HAMILTON.

Author of "The Starry Hosts," a prize book of the
Science and Art Education Council of England.

All Rights Reserved.

CHAPTER XIII.

A SUDDEN ARTISTIC AWAKENING.

"By the way," said Mr. Winstall next morning at the breakfast table, "Mr. Stuart may be over one of these days to see that picture. I saw him down town yesterday, and happened to mention the picture. He said he would like to see it, and would come over some time in daylight. I told him the early afternoon light was the best for the purpose."

"Why papa," said Grace, "that is very strange. Mr. Stuart never cared to see any of our other pictures. He said he knew nothing about art. I wonder what speciality interests him in this picture."

That was a problem which no one present seemed able to solve. If Miss Winstall had any idea she did not say anything. As one observer might have noticed that she colored very slightly and was a little confused for a moment.

It may be explained here that Mr. Winstall had a little hobby for art. He had naturally a fine taste, and being a man of leisure, would pick up a good picture now and then. He had even gone so far as to build a small wing to his house in which to hang his pictures. He did not go to any great length in gratifying his taste. He had not the energy to follow up the matter closely, nor did he wish to put any considerable sum of money into it. This last addition to his gallery was a picturesque scene on the coast of Southern California.

Now it so happened that Mr. Stuart came this very afternoon. His interest in the picture must have been very pressing, for he lost no time about it. And it so happened that Miss Pearce, Grace and Alfred were all out, for since Grace came home she had absorbed a good portion of Miss Pearce's company, so that Miss Winstall was left more to herself. It can readily be supposed that this condition of things suited Miss Winstall well, for her mind was very busy since the event of last Sunday, and she preferred to be more alone. She was just now meditating an important movement, but how to start it was a difficulty. If she could see Mr. Stuart she would consult him. She thought she saw a plan which might be effective if he took a certain part in it. She was thinking this out when Mr. Stuart arrived, and thus the opportunity she was hoping for seemed to present itself.

Mr. Stuart's great interest seemed to centre in that picture. He was a little awkward in announcing his particular errand. His manner was forced and unnatural. Perhaps he was conscious that this would seem a very sudden development of artistic taste on his part. It did look strange that a man who never looked at one of the Winstall pictures should be so suddenly interested in a bit of scenery away in California. But we do take strange streaks of fancy sometimes. And the mind has no doubt unusual and sudden developments. Psychology is a curious science.

Miss Winstall showed Mr. Stuart into

the gallery. She pointed out the picture. But it did not seem so intensely interesting to Mr. Stuart after all. He took a casual look at it, but took no pains to get the right perspective, and soon glanced around in a general way at other pictures. But he was not enraptured with any of them. Had his fancy been playing him a trick? Perhaps his appreciation of art had not awaked yet.

Miss Winstall noticed his unusual pre-occupation and embarrassment, and tactfully led him farther down the gallery; then stopping before a certain picture said, "That is the one I like best." It was the picture of Christ leading the blind man out of the town.

"I like that picture best," she said, "because the face of Christ there comes nearer to my ideal than any other I have seen."

"Yes," he said, "that is a good reason for liking it. I believe most people have an idea of their own as to our Saviour's appearance, and when they meet with a near approach to that on canvass it is natural to be pleased. And besides, having one's idea thus confirmed, it must be gratifying to see our Lord, as we think, worthily portrayed. One of my professors at college said that any man who painted the Christ ought either to be crucified or crowned."

Mr. Stuart was evidently coming out of his shell. He usually did so when something interested him. Whatever it was that constrained him before, it seemed to be gone now. Miss Winstall loved to hear him talk in such an elevated strain, and tried to lead him on.

"Would that face of the Christ come anywhere near your ideal," she asked.

"Well, on the spur of the moment I would say I think it comes very near it. That is, supposing I have an ideal. I don't think I had imagination enough to create such an ideal before, but you have helped me to create one, and it agrees with yours. Perhaps by some process of magnetism, or telepathy, you created it for me. At any rate I have an ideal now which I am not conscious of having had before, and that face comes nearer to it than any I have seen."

"There is a Life of Christ written by Dr. Smalidge," said Miss Winstall, "that gives quite a number of pictures of our Lord, and somehow—I can't say why—they make me feel confused and uncomfortable. For some reason or other they don't aid my conception of his real appearance."

"I can well believe that," said Mr. Stuart. "Those pictures must tend to rob you of your own ideal, so far as their influence goes, and that is not pleasant. Then the pictures, being themselves so different, tend to destroy each other, and so far as they can, they do away with your conception of a real Christ. So it is no wonder you feel confused. I think, therefore, the giving of so many pictures is a mistake. Even for their historic or artistic interest we do not want them. Let each devout soul summon up its own ideal.

I think it is best. Those who have imagination I suppose cannot help doing so. But if we fail altogether in our idea of his fleshly appearance we cannot be deceived about his spiritual appearance. He was the altogether lovely, the chief among ten thousand, full of grace and truth."

"Yes," said Miss Winstall, very solemnly, "And do you know," she added after a pause "I surrendered to him last Sunday morning."

Mr. Stuart wheeled round suddenly, and with flashing eyes looked into hers.

"You did," he said. "And what brought you to that point? may I ask?"

"Your sermon," she said, "I was drawn to Him who promised not to cast me out."

She had not intended to speak of this now. But the conversation so prepared the way that, that she feared would be very difficult became easy. She was glad she had made the confession. And now she went into detail. She told him of her aspirations after a worthier life, and how she had been humbled in realizing that she had neglected opportunities at her own door.

"But," said Mr. Stuart, "As to this surrender of last Sunday, don't you think you had really made that some time before?"

"Possibly it may be so," she replied, "I suppose the Spirit is moving on our hearts when we don't know. I was anxious and earnest before, but I was not conscious of taking the decided step till last Sunday."

More talk followed in a similar strain. A new joy had come to those two hearts. What joy can compare with being the means of conveying spiritual blessing, except the joy of receiving it? Miss Winstall was especially thankful that the way had so favorably opened for communicating her further plans to Mr. Stuart. It was easy to do so now.

"We might go into the drawing room," she said.

"There is something I would like to consult you about."

Taking a parting view of the gracious face on the canvass, she said, "The ideal beauty is the beauty of goodness, is it not?"

"Quite true," he said, "And in that you and Solomon very nearly agree. You remember that he said, 'A man's wisdom—that is a man's goodness-maketh his face to shine.'"

"Oh, yes," she said, "And don't you remember Stephen? His face shone like the face of an angel. What a pity that goodness and beauty are not always joined!"

"Ah, but they are sometimes," said he, and he bent on her a look that caused her heart to throb, and her cheeks to burn. He had not intended it. It was perfectly involuntary. He was not sure whether he would have recalled it, if he could. But he had no choice. For good or ill, the expression and the look could not come back.

In the drawing room Miss Winstall was not so self possessed as she had been on the gallery. The agitation that had been aroused in her would not quite subside. But she summoned all the calmness she could command, for she had an important scheme to unfold.

"Now," said he, "confide to me that is in your mind, and we may be able to see our way."