

THE MILLS OF THE GODS.

BY MARIA I. JOHNSTON.

THE little steamboat had groaned and labored through the tortuous, semi-navigable stream for a day and night, and now ran her bow up to the landing at Vauclose Plantation. Among the passengers who disembarked was Olive, or Olivia, Rothwell, aged twenty-two, and only ten months from Vermont. She had been a schoolmate (although younger) of Mrs. Colby, and had come South to teach her two little girls Roberta and Ethel. The mother had excused herself from taking a trip to the country, and on this occasion, when Miss Rothwell's oft-repeated wish to visit the plantation and see cotton growing was to be gratified, Mr. Colby himself and the above-mentioned children with their nurse, composed the party.

Mr. Colby's three-storied, brown brick house, sitting in the centre of a systematically improved town lot, was the dullest place in Wakefield. The husband and father was immersed in business, the wife and mother played the exclusive in a narrow circle, and for want of out-door exercise and mental occupation, had fallen into delicate health. She was, however, kind and gentle, and when Olive Rothwell thought it best to work for her living, in accordance with the sentiment of the community in which she lived, she found no difficulty in reminding her school friend of their old pledges of friendship at the seminary. "My children are five and seven years now," she wrote. "I mean the girls (the two boys as you know are mere babies) and need some teaching. Come and be their governess. Mr. Colby wishes it as much as myself."

It is often a little pilgrim, but a veritable soldier, that goes into the world in the form of a bright girl, seeking to maintain herself by the work of her head or her hands.

"Olivia" said her friend soon after she reached Wakefield, "I do not really wish you to work. Don't do it; you shall have your money just the same."

"Fannie, Fannie!" was the reply, "this is exactly what I feared. I will not take your money unless I can give you something for it. Can't you understand that I could have been fed and clothed in Vermont? I can never be contented till I can earn enough money to live on."

"That is absurd, and Mr. Colby says so. The morning you came he laughed a good deal and said, 'Pray is *this* your Yankee school ma'am? She will be much better at flirting than teaching. To whom will you marry her?'"

Olivia's pretty face turned crimson.

"If your husband really thinks our arrangement silly Fannie," she said, "perhaps——"

She did not go on, seeing that Mrs. Colby was not only perplexed but distressed. She wished to be very kind and it seemed she was giving pain. She stood a little in awe of Miss Rothwell, who had discovered that the children were over-indulged in some things and neglected in others. Olive was just charming in the parlor—she could keep Mr. Colby out of his study and prevent several habits of the house from yawning whenever she took the trouble. How much nicer if she would put on her blue silk, take to crocheting mats of rose-colored worsted, and leave the children to their nurses? What if they *were* bathed irregularly and ignorant of their alphabet? It was too early for them to suffer from its ill effects. Olivia, on her part, liked company and blue

silks and rose-colored mats, but she had some mental vigor and an inconvenient conscience. She had read and thought much on education, and had a great many theories that would not stand the test of experience or bring practical results, but they gave her an amount of enthusiasm that it was hard to restrain. She was much amused at discovering Mrs. Colby's first scheme to marry her off. It was to an old bachelor with money. After a little shyness they became good friends and enjoyed the joke together. She found herself put on the tapis afterwards for the inspection of several other parties. It was an annoyance but had to be endured. She wished for love but not for its counterfeit, and this daily and hourly discussion of matrimony was distasteful to her. Because Miss Rothwell was not susceptible, however, it must not be supposed that she was invulnerable. Even Diana fell in love with Endymion, and by and by there came a person whom Olive seemed bound to approve.

"You admit that he is handsome?" said the pleased Mrs. Colby.

"The handsomest man I ever saw."

"And a nice talker?"

"I enjoy his conversation very much."

After that they were constantly thrown together, and neither party appeared to object. When we introduced Miss Rothwell to the reader she was walking from the boat Headlight on to the levee at Vauclose, holding a little girl with each hand. Mr. Colby tarried to speak with the captain and the servant went forward with the satchels.

"Will there be such an immense rise in this river?" she heard asked.

"I'll bet on its being the biggest you ever saw," answered the captain.

"I don't like that prospect," said Mr. Colby, as he joined her. "My crop is too promising, and the season too far advanced for me to contemplate a high water with patience."

"In my State farmers think *they* have all the disadvantages that agriculture can labor under, and speak of Southern crops as if they grew uninterruptedly."

"They should come and try to raise cotton," said Mr. Colby, who, from an elevated position on the levee was looking about him in all directions.

The prospect was very pleasing. The long, low house with its broad gallery was in the midst of some fifty china and locust trees in full bloom. Pigeon houses on high staffs, stood like sentinels on either side. There were cisterns under lattice, arbors in front, and a yard with bright flowers to the right hand. Far down on the left the whitewashed cabins of the slaves were ranged in regular order, each fronting the river. From these improvements to the distant line of forest, the glebe was divided into fields, heaving with furrows through which the (as yet) unscraped cotton made deep green lines. Olivia walked on towards the house much pleased. Negroes were bringing in freight left by the boat on the landing, and a moment later a procession of plowmen, followed by what, in plantation parlance, is called the trash gang, came in sight returning from their day's labor. "Look, lady, look, children!" cried out some of the latter, and she found herself surrounded by a dusky throng, who inspected