

CHOICE LITERATURE.

A DAY OF FATE.

BY REV. B. P. RICE.

BOOK FIRST—CHAPTER IV.—REALITY.

"Father," said my fair ideal abruptly, as if a bright idea had just struck her, "did thee notice that Friend Jones's rockaway had been painted and all fixed up? I guess he rather liked our keeping him there before all the meeting."

"Mother, I hope thee'll be moved to preach about the charity that thinketh no evil," said her father gravely.

The young girl tossed her head slightly as she asserted, "Araminta Jones liked it any way. Any one could see that."

"And any one need not have seen it also," her mother said, with a pained look. Then she added in a low aside, as we rose from the table, "Thee certainly need not have spoken about thy friend's folly."

The daughter apparently gave little heed to her mother's rebuke, and a trivial remark a moment later proved that she was thinking of something else.

"Adah, thee can entertain Richard Morton for a time, while mother attends to the things," said her father.

The alacrity with which she complied was flattering at least, and she led me out on the piazza that corresponded with my day-dream.

"Zillah," called Mrs. Yocomb to her little girl, "do not bother Emily Warren. She may wish to be alone. Stay with Adah till I am through."

"Oh, mother, please let me go with Emily Warren. I never have a good time with Adah."

"There, mother, let her have her own way," said Adah pettishly. "Emily Warren, thee shouldn't pet her so if thee doesn't want to be bothered by her."

"She does not bother me at all," said Miss Warren quietly. "I like her."

The little girl that had been ready to cry turned to her friend a radiant face that was eloquent with the undisguised affection of childhood.

"Zillah evidently likes you, Miss Warren," I said, "and you have given the reason. You like her."

"Not always a sufficient reason for liking another," she answered.

"But a very good one," I urged.

"There are many better ones."

"What has reason to do with liking anyway?" I asked.

The mirthfulness I had noticed before glimmered in her eyes for a moment, but she answered demurely, "I have seen instances that give much point to your question, but I cannot answer it," and with a slight bow and smile she took her hat from Zillah and went down the path with an easy, natural carriage, that nevertheless suggested the city and its pavements rather than the country.

"What were you two talking about?" asked Adah, with a trace of vexed perplexity on her brow, for I imagined that my glance followed Miss Warren with some admiration and interest.

"You must have heard all we said."

"Where was the point of it?"

"What I said hadn't any point, so do not blame yourself for not seeing it. Don't you like little Zillah. She seems a nice, quiet child."

"Certainly I like her—she's my sister; but I detest children."

"I can't think that you were detested when you were a child."

"I don't remember; I might have been," she replied, with a slight shrug.

"Do you think that, as a child, you would enjoy being detested?"

"Mother says it often isn't good for us to have what we enjoy."

"Undoubtedly your mother is right."

"Well, I don't see things in that way. If I like a thing I want it, and if I don't like it I don't want it, and won't have it if I can help myself."

"Your views are not unusual," I replied, turning away to hide my contracting brow. "I know of others who cherish like sentiments."

"Well, I'm glad to meet with one who thinks as I do," she said complacently, and plucking a half-blown rose that hung near her, she turned its petals sharply down as if they were plaits of a hem that she was about to stitch.

"Here is the first harmonic chord in the sweet congeniality of which I dreamed," I inwardly groaned; but I continued, "How is it that you like Zillah as your sister, and not as a little girl?"

"Oh, everybody likes their brothers and sisters after a fashion, but one doesn't care to be bothered with them when they are little. Besides, children rumples and spoil my dress," and she looked down at herself approvingly.

"Now, there's Emily Warren," continued my "embodiment of June." "Mother is beginning to hold her up to me as an example. Emily Warren is half the time doing things that she doesn't like, and I think she's very foolish. She is telling Zillah a story over there under that tree. I don't think one feels like telling stories right after dinner."

"Yes, but see how much Zillah enjoys the story."

"Oh, of course she enjoys it. Why shouldn't she, if it's a good one?"

"Is it not possible that Miss Warren finds a pleasure in giving pleasure?"

"Well, if she does, that is her way of having a good time."

"Don't you think it's a sweet, womanly way?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Are you already smitten with Emily Warren's sweet womanly way?"

I confess that I both blushed and frowned with annoyance

and disappointment, but I answered lightly, "If I were, would I be one among many victims?"

"I'm sure I don't know," she replied, with her slight characteristic shrug, which also intimated that she didn't care.

"Miss Warren, I suppose, is a relative who is visiting you?"

"Oh, no, she is only a music teacher who is boarding with us. Mother usually takes two or three boarders through the summer months, that is, if they are willing to put up with our ways."

"I suppose it's correct to quote Scripture on Sunday afternoon. I'm sure your mother's ways are those of pleasantness and peace. Do you think she would take me as a boarder?"

"I fear she'll think you would want too much city style."

"That is just what I wish to escape from."

"I think city style is splendid."

"Why?"

"Oh, the city is gay and full of life and people. I once took walks down Fifth Avenue when making a visit in town, and I would be perfectly happy if I could do so every day."

"Perfectly happy? I wish I knew of something that would make me perfectly happy. Pardon me, I am only a business man, and can't be expected to understand young ladies very well. I don't understand why walking down Fifth Avenue daily would make you happy."

"Of course not. A man can't understand a girl's feelings in such matters."

"There is nothing in New York so beautiful as this June day in the country."

"Yes, it's a nice day; but father says we need more rain dreadfully."

"You have spoiled your rose."

"There are plenty more."

"Don't you like roses?"

"Certainly. Who does not like roses?"

"Let me give you another. See, here is one that has the hue of your cheeks."

"I suppose a city pallor like Emily Warren's is more to your taste."

"I am wholly out of humour with the city, and I do not like that which is colourless and insipid. I think the rose I have just given you very beautiful."

"Thanks for your roundabout compliment," and she looked pleased.

"I suppose your quiet life gives you much time for reading?"

"I can't say that I enjoy father and mother's books."

"I doubt whether I would myself; but you have your own choice?"

"I read a story now and then; but time slips away and I don't do much reading. We country girls make our own clothes, and you have no idea how much time it takes."

"Will you forgive me if I say that I think you make yours very prettily?"

Again she looked decidedly pleased; and, as if to reward me, she fastened the rose on her bosom.

"If she would only keep still," I thought, "and I could simply look at her as a draped statue, I could endure another half-hour; but every word she speaks is like the note of that carbird which broke the spell of harmony this morning. I have not yet seen a trace of idealism in her mind. Not a lovable trait have I discovered beyond her remarkable beauty, which mocks one with its broken promise. What is the controlling yet perverse principle of her life which makes her seem an alien in her own home? I am glad she does not use the plain language to me, since by nature she is not a Friend."

Miss Yocomb interrupted my thoughts by saying,

"I thought my dress would be much too simple and country-like for your taste. I can see myself that Emily Warren's dress has more style."

Resolving to explore a little, I said,

"I know a great many men in town."

"Indeed!" she queried, with kindling interest.

"Yes, and some of them are fine artists; and the majority have cultivated their tastes in various ways, both at home and abroad; but I do not think many of them have any respect for what you mean by 'style.' Shop-boys, clerks, and Fifth Avenue exquisites give their minds to the arbitrary mode of the hour; but the men in the city who amount to anything rarely know whether a lady's gown is of the latest cut. They do know, however, whether it is becoming and lady-like. The solid men of the city have a keen eye for beauty, and spend hundreds of thousands of dollars to enjoy its various phases. But half of the time they are anathematizing mere style. I have seen fashion transform a pretty girl into as near an approach to a kangaroo as nature permitted. Now, I shall be so bold as to say that I think your costume this afternoon has far better qualities than mere style. It is becoming, and in keeping with the day and season, and I don't care a fig whether it is the style or not."

My "perfect flower of womanhood" grew radiant, and her lips parted in a smile of ineffable content. In bitter disappointment I saw that my artifice had succeeded, and that I had touched the key-note of her being. To my horror, she reminded me of a pleased, purring kitten that had been stroked in the right direction.

"Your judgment is hasty and harsh," I charged myself, in half-angry accusation, loath to believe the truth. "You do not know yet that a compliment to her dress is the most acceptable thing she can receive. She probably takes it as a tribute to her good taste, which is one of woman's chief prerogatives."

I resolved to explore further, and continued,

"A lady's dress is like the binding of a book—it ought to be suggestive of her character. Indeed, she can make it a tasteful expression of herself. Our eye is often attracted or repelled by a book's binding. When it has been made with a fine taste, so that it harmonizes with the subject under consideration, we are justly pleased; but neither you nor I believe in the people who value books for the sake of their

covers only. Beauty and richness of thought, treasures of varied truth, sparkling wit, droll humour, or downright earnestness, are the qualities in books that hold our esteem. A book must have a soul and life of its own as truly as you or I; and the costliest materials, the wealth of a kingdom, cannot make a true book any more than a perfect costume and the most exquisite combination of flesh and blood can make a true woman." (I wondered if she were listening to me; for her face was taking on an absent look. Conscious that my homily was growing rather long, I concluded) "The book that reveals something new, or puts old truths in new and interesting lights—the book that makes us wiser, that cheers, encourages, comforts, amuses, and makes a man forget his stupid, miserable self, is the book we tie to. And so a man might well wish himself knotted to a woman who could do as much for him, and he would naturally be pleased to have her outward garb correspond with her spiritual beauty and worth."

My fair ideal had also reached a momentous conclusion, for she said, with the emphasis of a final decision,

"I won't cut that dress after Emily Warren's pattern. I'll cut it to suit myself."

I had been falling from a seventh heaven of hope for some time, but at this moment I struck reality with a thump that almost made me sick and giddy. The expression of my face reminded her of the irrelevancy of her remark, and she blushed slightly, but laughed it off, saying,

"Pardon me, that I followed my own thoughts for a moment rather than yours. These matters, no doubt, seem mere trifles to you gentlemen, but they are weighty questions to us girls who have to make a little go a great way. Won't you, please, repeat what you said about that lady who wrote a book for the sake of its binding? I think it's a pretty idea."

I was so incensed that I answered as I should not have done. "She was remarkably successful. Every one looked at the binding, but were soon satisfied to look no farther."

I was both glad and vexed that she did not catch my meaning, for she said, with a smile,

"It would make a pretty ornament."

"It would not be to my taste," I replied briefly. "The beautiful binding would hold out the promise of a good book, which, not being fulfilled, would be tantalizing."

"Do you know the lady well?"

"Yes, I fear I do."

"How strangely you look at me!"

"Excuse me," I said, starting. "I fear I followed your example and was thinking of something else."

But I let what I was thinking about slip out.

"It was indeed a revelation. My thoughts will not interest you, I fear. The experience of a man who saw a mirage in the desert came into my mind."

"I don't see what put that into your head."

"Nor do I, now. The world appears to me entirely matter-of-fact."

"I'm glad to hear you say that. Mother is always talking to me about spiritual meanings, and all that. Now I agree with you. Things are just what they are. Some we like, and some we don't like. What more is there to say about them? I think people are very foolish if they bother themselves over things or people they don't like. I hope mother will take you to board, for I would like to have someone in the house who looks at things as I do."

"Thanks. Woman's intuition is indeed unerring."

"I declare, there comes Silas Jones with his new top-buggy. You won't mind his making one of our party, will you?"

"I think I will go to my room and rest a while, and thus I shall not be that chief of this world's evils—the odious third party." And I rose decisively.

"I'd rather you wouldn't go," she said. "I don't care specially for him, and he does not talk half so nicely as you do. You needn't go on his account. Indeed, I like to have half a dozen gentlemen around me."

"You are delightfully frank."

"Yes, I usually say what I think."

"And do as you please," I added.

"Certainly. Why shouldn't I when I can? Don't you?"

"But I come from the wicked city."

"So does Emily Warren."

"Is she wicked?"

"I don't know; she keeps it to herself if she is; and, by the way, she is very quiet. I can never get her to talk much about herself. She appears so good 'hat mother is beginning to quote her as an example, and that, you know, always makes one detest a person. I think there is some mystery about her. I'm sorry you will go, for I've lots of questions I'd like to ask you now we are acquainted."

"Pardon me; I'm not strong, and must have a rest. Silas Jones will answer just as well."

"Not quite," she said softly, with a smile designed to be bewitching.

As I passed up the hall I heard her say, "Silas Jones, I'm pleased to see thee."

I threw myself on the lounge in my room in angry disgust.

"Oh, Nature!" I exclaimed, "what excuse have you for such perverseness? By every law of probability—by the ordinary sequence of cause and effect—this girl should have been what I fancied her to be. This, then, forsooth, is the day of my fate! It would be the day of doom did some malicious power chain me to this brainless, soulless, heartless creature. What possessed Nature to make such a blunder, to begin so fairly and yet reach such a lame and impotent conclusion? To the eye the girl is the fair and proper outcome of this home and beautiful country life. In reality she is a flat contradiction to it all, reversing in her own character the native traits and acquired graces of her father and mother."

As if controlled and carried forward by a hidden and malign power, she goes steadily against her surrounding influences that, like the winds of heaven, might have wafted her toward all that is good and true. Is not sweet, quaint Mrs. Yocomb her mother? Is not the genial, hearty old