

CHOICE LITERATURE.

A DAY OF FATE.

BY REV. E. F. ROE

BOOK FIRST.—CHAPTER IX.—"OLD PLOD."

"Emily Warren, why does thee bring Richard Morton back so soon?" asked Mr. Yocomb, suspending for a moment the sweep of his hand that was scattering grain.

"You are mistaken, sir," I said; "I brought Miss Warren back. I thought she would enjoy seeing you feed the poultry, the horses, and especially the cows."

"Thee's more self-denying than I'd a been," he resumed, with his humorous twinkle. "Don't tell mother, but I wouldn't mind taking a walk with Emily Warren myself on a June evening like this."

"I will take a walk with you whenever you wish," laughed Miss Warren; "but I'll surely tell Mrs. Yocomb."

"Oh! I know I'd get found out," said the old man, shaking his head ruefully; "I always do."

"I am sure you would if Miss Warren were here," I added. "I am at a loss to know how early in the day she found me out."

"Well, I guess thee's a pretty square sort of a man. If thee'd been stealing sheep Emily Warren wouldn't laugh at thee so approvingly. I'm finding out that she rather likes the people she laughs at. At least, I take that view, for she laughs at me a great deal. I knew from Emily Warren's laugh that thee hadn't anything very bad to tell mother."

"I admit that, at the time, I enjoyed being laughed at—a rather rare experience."

"You needn't, either of you, plume yourselves that you are irresistibly funny. I laugh easily. Mr. Yocomb, why do you feed the chickens so slowly? I have noticed it before. Now Reuben, and Hiram, the man, throw the corn all down at once."

"They are in more of a hurry than I am. I don't like to do anything in a hurry, least of all to eat my dinner. Now, why should these chickens, turkeys, and ducks gobble everything right down? The corn seems to taste good to them; so, after a handful, I wait till they have had a chance to think how good the last kernel was before they get another. You see I greatly prolong their pleasure."

"And in these intervals you meditate on Thanksgiving day, I suppose," she said.

"Emily Warren, thee's a good Yankee. I admit that that young gobbler there did suggest a day on which I am always very thankful, and with good reason. I had about concluded before thee came that, if we were both spared—i.e., that gobbler and I—till next November, I would probably survive him."

"How can you have the heart to plan against that poor creature's life so coolly? See how he turns his round, innocent eyes toward you, as if in gratitude. If he could know that the hand that feeds him would chop off his head, what a moral shock he would sustain! That upturned beak should be to you like a reproachful face."

"Emily Warren, we expect thee to eat thy Thanksgiving dinner with us; and that young gobbler will probably be on the table. Now what part of him will thee take on that occasion?"

"A piece of the breast, if you please."

"Richard Morton, is not Emily Warren as false and cruel as I am?"

"Just about."

"Is thee not afraid of her?"

"I would be if she were unfriendly."

"Oh, thee thinks everybody in this house is friendly. Emily Warren, thee must keep up our good name," he added, with a mischievous nod toward her.

"Mr. Yocomb, you are forgetting the chickens altogether. There are some staid and elderly hens that are going to bed in disgust, you have kept them waiting so long."

"See how quick they'll change their minds," he said, as he threw down a handful of corn. "Now isn't that just like a hen?" he added, as they hastened back.

"And just like a woman also, I'm sure you want to suggest," said Miss Warren.

"I suppose thee never changes thy mind."

"I'm going to change the subject. Poultry with their feathers on don't interest me very much. The male birds remind me of a detestable class of conceited men, that one must see daily in the city, whose gallantry is all affectation, and who never for a moment lose sight of themselves or their own importance. That strutting gobbler there, Mr. Morton, remind me of certain eminent statesmen whom your paper delights to honour, and I imagine that that ridiculous creature embodies their idea of the American eagle. Then the hen, have such a simple, unthinking aspect. They act as if they expected to be crowed over as a matter of course; and thus typify the followers of these statesmen, who are so pre-eminent in their own estimation. Their exalted perches seem to be awarded unquestioningly."

"So you think, Miss Warren, that I have the simple, unthinking aspect typified by the physiognomy of these hens?"

"Mr. Morton, I was generalizing. We always except present company. Remember, I disagree with your paper, not you; but why you look up to these human species of the gobbler as something I can't understand, and being only a woman, that need not seem strange to you."

"Since I must tell you the truth on all occasions, *noiens volens*, you have hit on a subject wherein I differ from my paper. Human phases of the gobbler are not pleasant."

"But the turkey phase is, every," said Mr. Yocomb, throwing a handful of corn down before his favourite, which, like certain eminent statesmen, immediately looked after his own interests.

"Mr. Yocomb, please let me help you feed the horses," said Miss Warren, leading the way into the barn, where on one side were mows for hay and grain, and, on the other, stalls for several horses. The sleek and comfortable animals seemed to know the young girl, for they thrust out their

black and brown noses toward her and projected their ears, instead of laying them back viciously, as when I approached; and one old plough-horse that had been much neglected, until Miss Warren began to pet him, gave a loud ecstatic whinny.

"Oh, you big, honest old fellows!" she exclaimed, caressing one and another, "I'd rather teach you than half my pupils."

"In which half do you place me?" I asked.

"You? Oh, I forgot; I was to teach you topography. I will assign you by and by, after you have had a few lessons."

"A man ought to do as well as a horse, so I hope to win your favour."

"I wish all men did as well as Mr. Yocomb's horses. They evidently have the family name and respectability to keep up. Mr. Yocomb, what is it that smells so sweetly?"

"That is the red-top clover we cut last week."

"Oh, isn't it good? I wouldn't mind having some myself," and she snatched down a fragrant handful from the mow. "Here, Old Plod," she said, turning to the plough-horse, "the world has rather snubbed you, as it has honest worth before. Mr. Yocomb, you and Reuben are much too fond of gay horses."

"Shall I tell Reuben that thee'd rather ride after Old Plod, as thee calls him?"

"No, I thank you; I'll go on as I've begun. I'm not changeable."

"Now, friend Morton, is not Emily Warren as bad as I am about gay horses?"

"I'm inclined to think she is about as bad as you are in all respects."

"Emily Warren, thee needn't put on any more airs. Richard Morton thinks thee isn't any better than I am, and there's nothing under the sun an editor doesn't know."

"I wish he were right this time," she said, with a laugh and sigh curiously blended. "It seems to me, Mr. Yocomb, that you have grown here in the country like your clover-hay, and are as good and wholesome. In New York it is so different, especially if one has no home life; you breathe a different atmosphere from us in more respects than one. This fragrant old barn appears to me more of a sanctuary than some churches in which I have tried to worship, and its dim evening light more religious."

"According to your faith," I said, "no shrine has ever contained so precious a gift as a manger."

"According to *our* faith, if you please, Mr. Morton."

By an instinct that ignored a custom of the Friends, but exemplified their spirit, the old man took off his hat as he said, "Yes, friend Morton, according to *our* faith. The child that was cradled in a manger tends to make the world innocent."

The old barn has indeed become a sanctuary, I thought, in the brief silence that followed. Miss Warren stepped to the door, and I saw a quick gesture of her hands to her eyes. Then she turned and said in her piquant way,

"Mr. Yocomb, our talk reminds me of the long grace in Latin which the priests said before meals, and which the hungry people couldn't understand. The horses are hinting broadly that oats would be more edifying. If it were Monday, I'd wager you a plum that they would all leave your oats to eat clover-hay out of my hand."

"We'll arrange about the bet to-morrow, and now try the experiment," said Mr. Yocomb, relapsing into his genial humour at once.

I was learning, however, that a deep, earnest nature was hidden by this outward sheen and sparkle. Filling his four-quart measure from the cobwebbed bin, he soon gave each horse his allowance.

"Now, Richard Morton, thee watch her, and see that she doesn't coax too much, or come it over them with any unlawful witchery. Take the hay thyself, Emily, and we'll stand back."

I went to the farther end of the barn, near Old Plod, and stood where I could see the maiden's profile against the light that streamed through the open door. Never shall I forget the picture I then saw. The tall, ample figure of the old Quaker stood in the background, and his smile was broad and genial enough to have lighted up a dungeon. Above him rose the odorous clover, a handful of which Miss Warren held out to the horse in the first stall. Her lips were parted, her eyes shining, and her face had the intent, eager interest of a child, while her attitudes and motions were full of unstudied and unconscious grace.

The first horse munched stolidly away at his oats. She put the tempting wisp against his nose, at which he laid back his ears and looked vicious. She turned to Mr. Yocomb, and the old barn echoed to a laugh that was music itself as she said,

"You have won your plum if it is Sunday. I shall try all the other horses, however, and thus learn to value correctly the expressions of affection I have received from these long-nosed gentlemen."

One after another they munched on, regardless of the clover. Step by step she came nearer to me, smiling and frowning at her want of success. My heart thrilled at a beauty that was so unconventional and so utterly self-forgetful. The blooming clover, before it fell at a sweep of the scythe, was the fit emblem of her then, she looked so young, so fair, and sweet.

"They are as bad as men," she exclaimed, "who will forgive any wrong rather than an interruption at dinner."

She now stood at my side before Old Plod, that 'far star, in his single-minded attention to his oats, had seemingly forgotten her presence, but as he lifted his head from the manger, and saw her, he took a step forward, and reached his great brown nose toward her, rather than for the clover. In brief, he said, in his poor dumb way,

"I like you better than hay or oats."

The horse's simple, undisguised affection, for some reason, touched the girl deeply; for she dropped the hay and threw her arm around the horse's head, leaning her face against his. I saw a tear in her eye as she murmured,

"You have more heart than all the rest put together. I don't believe anyone was ever kind to you before, and you've

been a bit lonely, like myself." Then she led the way hastily out of the barn, saying, "Old Plod and I are sworn friends from this time forth; and I shall take your advice, Old Plod."

I was soon at her side, and asked,

"What advice did Old Plod give you?"

For some inexplicable reason she coloured deeply, then laughed as she said,

"It's rarely wise to think aloud; but impulsive people will do it sometimes. I suppose we all occasionally have questions to decide that to us are perplexing and important, though of little consequence to the world. Come; if we are to see the old garden, we must make the most of the fading light. After my interview with Old Plod, I can't descend to cows and pigs; so good-by, Mr. Yocomb."

CHAPTER X.—A BIT OF EDEN.

"This is my first entrance into Eden," I said, as we passed through the rustic gate made of cedar branches and between posts green with American ivy.

"Like another man, you won't stay here long."

"Like Adam, I shall certainly go out when you do."

"That will be before very long, since I have promised Mr. Yocomb some music."

"Even though a Bohemian editor, as you may think. I am conscious of a profound gratitude to some beneficent power, for I never could have chosen so wisely myself. I might have been in Sodom and Gomorrah—for New York in contrast seems a union of both—receiving reports of the crimes and casualties of the day, but I am here, with this garden in the foreground and music in the background."

"You don't know anything about the music, and you may yet wish it so far in the background as to be inaudible."

"I admit that I will be in a dilemma when we reach the music, for no matter how much I protest, you will know just what I think."

"Yes, you had better be honest."

"Come, open for me the treasures of your ripe experience. You have been a week in the country. I know you will give me a rosebud—a rare old-fashioned one, if you please, with a quaint, sweet meaning, for I see that such abound in this garden, and I am wholly out of humour with the latest mode in everything. Recalling your taste for homely, honest worth, as shown by your passion for Old Plod, I shall seek a blossom among the vegetables for you. Ah, here is one that is sweet, white, and pretty," and I plucked a cluster of flowers from a potato-hill. "By the way, what flower is this?" I asked demurely.

She looked at it blankly for a moment, then remarked, with a smile, "You have said that it was sweet, white, and pretty. Why inquire further?"

"Miss Warren, you have been a week in the country and don't know a potato-blossom."

"Our relations may be changed," she said, "and you become the teacher."

"Oh, here comes Zillah. We will settle the question according to Scripture. Does it not say, 'A little child shall lead them?' Whom are you so glad to see, little one, Miss Warren or me?"

"I don't know thee very well yet," she said shyly.

"Do you know Miss Warren very well?"

"Oh, yes, indeed."

"How soon did you come to know her well?"

"The first day, when she kissed me."

"I think that's a very nice way of getting acquainted. Won't you let me kiss you good-night when you get sleepy?"

She looked at me with a doubtful smile, and said, "I'm afraid thy mustache will tickle me."

The birds were singing in the orchard near, but there was not a note that to my ear was more musical than Miss Warren's laugh. I stooped down before the little girl as I said,

"Suppose we see if a kiss tickles you now, and if it don't now, you won't mind it then, you know."

She came hesitatingly to me, and gave the coveted salute with a delicious mingling of maidenly shyness and childish innocence and frankness.

"Ah!" I exclaimed, "Eden itself contained nothing better than that. To think that I should have been so honoured—I who have written the *recess* of enough crimes to sink a world!"

"Perhaps if you had committed some of them she wouldn't have kissed you."

"If I had to live in a ninety-nine story tenement-house, as so many do, I think that I would have committed them all. Well, I may come to it. Life is a risky battle to such as I, but I'm in heaven now."

"You do seem very happy," she said, looking at me wistfully.

"I am very happy. I have given myself up wholly to the influences of this day, letting them sway me, lead me whithersoever they will. If this is a day of destiny, no stupid foolishness of mine shall thwart the happy combination of the stars. That the Fates are propitious I have singular reason to hope. Yesterday I was a broken and dispirited man. This evening I feel the influence of all this glad June life. Good Mrs. Yocomb has taken me in hand. I'm to study topography with a teacher who has several other lumps besides that of locality, and Zillah is going to show us the garden of Eden."

"Is this like the garden of Eden?" the little girl asked, looking up at me in surprise.

"Well, I'm not sure that it's just like it, but I'm more than content with this garden. In one respect I think it's better—there are no snakes here. Now, Zillah, lead where you please, I'm in the following mood. Do you know where any of these birds live? Do you think any of them are at home on their nests? If so, we'll call and pay our respects. When I was a horrid boy I robbed a bird's nest, and I often have a twinge of remorse for it."

"Do you want to see a robin's nest?" asked Zillah excitedly.

"Yes, indeed."

"Then come, and walk softly when I do. There's one