

## CHAPTER I

## UP THE RIVER

'CAN you not be content, George?' asked the girl sitting in the stern. 'I think that I want nothing more than this. If we could only go on always, and always, and always, just like this.' She had taken off her right-hand glove, and she was dipping her fingers into the cool waters of the river as the boat slowly drifted down stream. 'Always like this,' she repeated softly. 'With you close to me—so that I could touch you if I wanted to—so that I could feel safe, you know—the sun behind us, warm and splendid, such a sweet and fragrant air about us, trees and gardens and fields and lanes on either side—and both of us always young, George, and—and nice to look at, and all the world before us.'

She, for one, was not only young and nice to look upon, but fair—very fair to look upon. Even young persons of her own sex, critics and specialists in the Art and Science of Beauty—rivals as well—had to confess that Elsie was rather pretty. I believe that few such critics ever go farther. She was, to begin with, of sufficient stature, in a time when dumpy women are not considered, and when height is a first necessity of comeliness: she paid, next, such obedience to the laws of figure as becomes the age of twenty, and is, with stature, rigorously demanded at this end of the century. Her chief points, perhaps, lay in her eyes, which were of a darker shade of blue than is common. They were soft, yet not languid; they were full of light; they were large, and yet they could be quick. Her face was subject to sudden changes that made it like a spring-time sky of shower, rainbow, sunshine, and surprise. Her hair was of a very common brown, neither dark nor light. She was attired, this evening, in a simple gray frock of nun's cloth with a bunch of white roses on her left shoulder.

When one says that her companion was a young man, nearly all is said, because the young men of the present day are surprisingly alike. Thousands of young men can be found like George Austin: they are all excellent fellows, of much higher principles, on some subjects, than their fathers