

Choice Literature.

ONE WOMAN'S RE-VOLT.

Miss Janet Pierson turned from the dusty highway, and seated herself on the stone wall by the roadside. She was tired, very tired. She always had been tired. It had been her fate to live at the tiresome end of town always. She held in her hand a circular describing Ocean Grove and its surroundings on the New Jersey coast. This circular, dropped by chance from a passing carriage on the country road, had, for the tired soul, an absorbing interest.

Dr. Pierson, Miss Janet's father, had lived and practised in a greater number of towns in the State of Connecticut than any other man in his profession, the chief obstacle to success having been his own impatience. It was that that had prevented his remaining in any one place long enough to secure a living practice. At last Dr. Pierson bought a small farm, lived on it a year, and then moved on for the last time, leaving his wife and three daughters—Margaret, Janet and Katharine—in the old farm-house, two miles from the village of Templeton.

Margaret was satisfied with the farm and farm life. She cared for everything on it, and for nothing beyond it. Janet was tired of living over and over the self same old days, year after year, but there seemed no way of getting away from the farm for her; no means to get anywhere beyond its influence. Katharine, the youngest daughter, taught the children of that district in the small schoolhouse at the cross-roads, half way to the village. Katharine always had money enough to go her own way at vacation time; to get what rest and change she could, and then returned to her teaching again, one year being very much like all the other years.

Miss Janet sat on the stone wall, thinking. She was in full sight of the farm-house; in full sight of the kitchen windows and of the table where Margaret was getting ready to make crullers. She knew that Margaret was waiting for the nutmegs; but, for once, Miss Janet did not hurry. She was making up her mind, and looking again and again at the two or three leaves of the circular she had found scattered along the roadside as she walked up to Templeton, two hours earlier.

"They were thrown right here for me," she exclaimed. "I shall act on the hint they give me."

"Mother!" called Margaret from the kitchen.

"What is it?" questioned Mrs. Pierson from her room.

"Do look up the road there and see Janet! There she sits on the stone wall as though I declare, it is enough to destroy the patience of a saint to see her! What she wanted to walk all the way to the postoffice for, this hot morning, is more than I know. I'm going to see if I can make her hear."

Margaret called, but the wind carried her voice down the hill in the opposite direction. Miss Janet sat still on the stone wall until it was her good pleasure to cease the study of the leaves, to arise; to go home.

When she entered the house it was by way of the kitchen door.

"Well, Janet?" said Margaret, enquiringly.

"I have made up my mind, Margaret," responded Janet.

"Out of what this time?"

"Out of this forever the same-day-after day year after year sort of life that we have been living here. I am going to do something, even if it is desperate," announced Janet. "I am going off to-morrow."

"Where to, pray?"

"I am going to spend this very summer by the ocean somewhere and somehow, if I have to live under an umbrella on the open beach in the day-time and under a blanket shelter behind a sand dune at night."

"Crazy! Janet, I do believe you are crazy! Did you remember the tea and the nutmegs? Where will you get your umbrella, Janet?"

"Yes; I'm sane enough to remember your errands, Margaret, and I did think you would lend me your umbrella in case I had not one of my own."

During the hours of that day, it was the 10th of May, 1884, life went on its accustomed round in the Pierson farm-house. Not another allusion was made to Miss Janet's announcement of the morning; but that lady thought of little beside that.

In an old and well-worn soft leathern purse Miss Janet had kept from the days of her early girlhood a few gold and silver treasures; coins that had been given to her in remembrance, for luck, as heirlooms from her grandparents. Again and again, in the stress of her life, she had taken out this purse, looked the coins over, and tried to select from the number such as she could persuade herself that she was willing to spend; but always and ever she had decided to go without the thing the money would buy, and the precious coins had been slipped back, the clasp closed with a sigh, and the purse returned to its hiding-place.

On this 10th of May, 1884, Miss Janet opened the small leathern purse, and deliberately turned out the coins into her black silk apron, as she sat by the open window of an upper room, into which the sunlight was pouring its May gold, to burnish her little store.

"This time it shall be done," she said, selecting first a three-dollar gold piece. "Let me see." This was given to me by brother Philip with the words, 'Keep that until you want bread.' It is bread that I want; the bread of a new life," she cried. "The time for that is come." Again she poured her gave into the little board. "No, not that!" she shivered forth, laying aside a coin that had been found on her father's person after his sudden death. "Then she thought, 'I will close my eyes, and the first one my fingers touch shall go.' Softly stirring the shining bits of metal with closed eyes, she laid a finger on an old silver dollar. She had had it ever since she could remember. Her grandmother had given it to her, but her mind made up, that was laid beside the three-dollar coin. Three additions were made, one by one, to the selected store. These were laid in her pocket book; the remainder went to their old home and were hidden away for future needs.

The next morning early, Miss Janet made herself ready for a short journey, announced her departure with her bonnet on, and left the house before Mrs. Pierson, Margaret or Katharine could recover from their astonishment.

"Where on earth do you suppose she is going?" cried Margaret.

"Not far! She will be back in an hour or two. I dare say she is only going up for the mail," commented Katharine. "You had better go after your sister," said Mrs. Pierson. "Persuade her to come back. I am afraid she will do something foolish if you don't."

"I don't think Janet is persuadable," slowly announced Margaret, her eyes on the fast retreating figure of Miss Janet, who was hastening to catch the early train for New York.

Half-way to the village she met Mr. Horace Hine. Mr. Hine was the great manufacturer of Templeton. He was a very unusual thing for him—walking in the same direction from a cross road to the same station. Mr. Hine was going to New York that morning. He knew quite well who the little lady was hastening up the dusty road to their place of meeting, and he paused a moment to join her in their walk. He offered to carry the small hand-bag she held. Miss Janet gave it to him, not because it was heavy, or she had been conscious of a burden, but because it was so pleasant, so unusual, to receive a courtesy.

"Are you bound on a shopping expedition?" questioned Mr. Hine, as they drew near the station at Templeton.

"No, not exactly," replied Miss Janet, growing suddenly into colour and confusion of face, and then becoming conscious that she had shown a sense of shame in that which she was about to do, she said boldly, "Mr. Hine, do you think it is wicked, absolutely wrong, to seek something new now and then? I don't, and I am going to look for a place to spend the summer in, down by the ocean. I am going down, I don't exactly know where, but somewhere on the Atlantic coast, near Ocean Grove, to look about."

"Are you going to take a cottage?" questioned Mr. Hine.

"Take a cottage! take a cottage!" The very suggestion took away her breath. How could she, and Miss Janet pinched, with all her might, the gold coin, the silver dollar, and the other coins that kept them company in her pocket-book.

"I never thought of such a thing!" she said; and then, grown suddenly confidential, she put the three-dollar gold piece into Mr. Hine's hand with the request that he would buy her ticket.

He did so, but she noticed that he gave a bank-note to the man at the ticket office. Had she only been able to do that she would not have troubled him to make the purchase for her. She felt ashamed to offer her precious bit of gold hoarded since the war began.

The train came in, the train went out, and two hours later as it was drawing near New York, Mr. Hine sought Miss Janet.

"Can I do anything to aid you?" he said. "I have plenty of friends, who have cottages in Ocean Grove and Asbury Park, but at this season they are not there."

"If you would direct me through the city it would be such a relief," she said, and then, laughingly, she added, "I begin to think they are right at home, that I am a little crazy to start off on such an expedition. My heart begins to fail me at the thought of finding my way through New York, I am such a stranger here."

"It will give me pleasure to see you safely on your way," he said, and presently they were speeding down the elevated road.

"By the way," said Mr. Hine, "I was so interested in the gold piece you gave me this morning that I kept it. I have quite a collection of coins, but I have not one of these, taking it from his pocket, "and if you like to part with it, it is worth considerably more than its face value. I will buy it."

Miss Janet blushed vividly, as she said, with utter frankness, "You will know, if I do not tell you, that I was reduced to the spending of this. I have had it many years, and took it, with others, from my little collection, for this expedition."

"Don't spend them, not one of them, until I have seen them; please don't," said Mr. Hine. "I do not know the exact value of this three-dollar piece of 1854, but you will let me lend you some money until we find out."

Miss Janet was so fairly caught that she could not do otherwise than to accept his offer. Mr. Hine went to the ferry with her, bought her ticket for Ocean Grove and return, encouraged her expedition, and bade her good-by.

And now, for the first time, Miss Janet was alone with the great world of one railway car, her cheeks burning and her whole nature filled with the most exquisite sense of shame, in that she had revealed to Mr. Hine her poverty and her folly. "It is all my own fault," she thought. "If I had stayed at home where I belong, I might have gone on just as I have done, and he need never have known. Margaret is right. She believes in being content in the sphere in which Providence has placed her. She can be, I cannot," and Miss Pierson exhaled a sigh of satisfaction as the train sped across the vast area of salt meadows that were only just beginning to lose their tints of silver gray for the new growth. Something new and broad and vivid swept into her being and washed out that miserable little personal sense of shame at her poverty, that had so overwhelmed her for the first two miles of that journey.

To be wild for the first time in her life Miss Janet was thirty-two to be going somewhere, alone, with no restraint, whatever, was enough to elate the much restrained little soul, and she felt all the exultation of it, so long as the train sped fast down the coast.

All too soon came the brakeman's cry, "Ocean Grove and Asbury Park." Miss Janet poked up her little hand bag and hastened out upon the platform. She had expected to encounter crowds of "hackmen"; crowds of eager passengers; but the station was nearly as quiet as that at Templeton. She evaded questions as to her destination by going into the waiting room. Once there, she sat down as though she were feeling very tired indeed, then she got up, just as the ticket office window was closing, and secured a time table of the road. Yes, trains ran so frequently that she could go up at almost any hour. There was no hurry. A girl of twelve, or thereabout, entered the room. "Do you live here?" questioned Miss Janet.

"Near here, ma'am, over at Ocean Park."

"What is Ocean Park?"

"Oh, it is a place that isn't Ocean Grove, across the lake yonder. I'll show you when the next train comes in, if you like. I am waiting for grandmother."

"Thank you," said Miss Janet, "can we walk there?"

"Yes, all but the lake, and we can go round by the shore, only we don't very often, 'cause it's farther, and all sand, and there's another way, too, around by the turnpike, but that's farther than any, and so we row across the lake."

"How long do you wait for the train?"

"Half an hour."

Now a row across a lake seemed to Miss Janet something to be greatly dreaded, and the walk along the beach something greatly to be desired.

"Could I not, if you tell me the way," she said, "walk along by the ocean, and meet you on the other side of the lake?"

"Course you can," replied the young girl. "I'll walk up a way and show you. You can't get lost. You go right up the next street, till you come to the sea, then you turn to the right and keep along on the shore till you pass all the houses and get to a great big bathing-house place—they call it a pavilion—that is Killgores, and that is where Fletcher Lake empties into the ocean. You go right through that and then you are on the wild sands. I had to go that way to school all winter. You keep down on the sands, oh, a quarter of a mile or more, and then you will come to a green looking, long house, with a great bulk-head of sand built out in front of it. You can sit down there on a bench on the veranda and wait for me, if you get there first. Nobody lives there. It used to be an Infants' Home, but somebody didn't like it, and it isn't lived in any more."

"You wouldn't be afraid to go?" questioned Miss Janet.

"Afraid? There's nothing there but the tide, and you needn't walk too near the edge. You can see when a big breaker is coming and keep out of the way."

Ocean! sea! tide! breakers! How glibly this twelve-year girl talked of them, as though they were, one and all, intimate playmates of hers, and here was this woman of two-and-thirty years, with her very nerves a-tremble at the sound of the words and the consciousness that she was, for the first time, about to be ushered into their presence.

She passed on, by all the ways and avenues of Ocean Grove, came to Killgores, which she instantly recognized, looked down at the turbid stream emptying the dark waters of Fletcher Lake into the bright ocean, and then passed to the region left from the beginning, to the hand of Nature. There, for the first time, she saw the sand dunes, piled, and piling in, with every wind that blew, the old, twisted sand grass of the former years, matted into the sand, the long, lonely stretch of pale yellow, shining tawny in the May sunshine, the three-breakered seas running in and out over it with boom and quivering thud. At last she was alone with the ocean in its own home.

Down the coast she saw the Infants' Home, and hastened on. Elizabeth, the friend of an hour ago, was already there waiting for her.

"Have you had your dinner?" was the first question Elizabeth asked. "Dinner!" laughed Miss Janet. "Why, do folks down here get hungry?"

"Awfully hungry! Why, even the fishes eat each other," said Elizabeth. "Mother told me to fetch you home to dinner. Will you come? It isn't far. It is this side of them pine woods, over by the lake yonder."

Miss Janet suddenly became conscious of a hitherto unfelt want, and a desire to accept the invitation given so promptly.

"Mother said," continued Elizabeth, "that, like as not, you had come down to get a house for the summer—maybe, to keep boarders, and I was to show you over the cottages."

"Do many folks come that way?"

"Oh, lots of 'em! You'd better keep to the board walk; it's kinder damp up here aways. More of 'em than I can count on my fingers. These five cottages here, close by the Home, they belong to folks what lives in them themselves; though, mother says, there's one of 'em that can be had if asked for by the right party. It's this one, right here. Just been painted up fine. Blue winders to the piazzas is what most folks like. Want to see it? Mother's got the key."

"What does a cottage cost? I mean the use of one down here."

"Oh, just as much as folks is willing to pay, but not as much as they do across the lake. Over in the Grove they is pretty high; and at the Park prices is just awful," informed Elizabeth.

"But this little one—not more than six or eight rooms in it, Scribner, I think you told me was the name of the owner—what do you think it could be had for?"

"Well," said Elizabeth, "I know just what she will ask you, and that's two hundred dollars; but I heard her tell my mother that she would rather let it for one hundred and twenty-five than have it stand idle. The furniture inside ain't much, though. There! the next house after we get by three more is ours, and they was going to wait dinner for us."

"How kind!" said Miss Janet, hastening her steps. It was so sweet walking between the breath of the sea and the breath of the pines. She wondered whether the time would ever come when she should tire of it.

Five minutes later Miss Janet Pierson was dining comfortably and pleasantly with a family of whose very existence she knew not when she awoke that morning.

Mrs. Knapp, the mother of Elizabeth, had lived in Ocean Park since its beginning, fifteen years before. She was the very earliest living inhabitant of the place, and high authority regarding the beginning of things, from Deal to Spring Lake.

The keys of half the cottages at Ocean Park (there were about thirty cottages) were left in her keeping, and she acted as real estate agent for their owners in every way, except as to salary.

Miss Janet felt like an impostor as she sat at table and partook of food with a keener relish than she had supposed could come to her. She longed to say out at once that she hadn't money enough to pay a month's rent of the poorest shanty on the coast.

"Are you looking for a cottage?" questioned Mrs. Knapp, as the dinner ended.

With a quick little gasp Miss Janet laughed, and felt called upon to give her history:—

"My name," she said, "is Janet Pierson. My father was a physician. I live in Connecticut with my mother and two sisters. I came down to see what this region was like, and, if any way opened to me, to spend the summer here."

"Oh! looking for board, were you?"

(To be Continued.)

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