

CHOICE LITERATURE.

A DAY OF FATE.

BY REV. H. P. ROE.

BOOK FIRST—CHAPTER II.—A JUNE DAY DREAM.

"Hush," I answered Conscience, imperiously; "since the old Friend lady will not preach, I shall endure none of your homilies. I yield myself to the influences of this day, and during this hour no curb shall be put on fancy. In my soul I know that I would be a better man if she is what she seems, and could be to me all that I have dreamed; and were I tenfold worse than I am, she would be the better for making me better. Did not Divine purity come the closest to sinful humanity? I shall approach this maiden in fancy, and may seek her in reality, but it shall be with a respect so sincere and an homage so true as to rob my thoughts and quest of bold irreverence or of mere selfishness. Suppose I am seeking my own good, my own salvation it may be, I am not seeking to wrong her. Are not heaven's best gifts best won by giving all for them? I would lay my manhood at her feet. I do not expect to earn her or buy her, giving a *quid pro quo*. A woman's love is like the grace of heaven—a royal gift; and the spirit of the savior is more regarded than his desert. Moreover, I do not propose to soil her life with the evil world that I must daily brush against, but through her influence to do a little toward purifying that world. Since this is but a dream, I shall dream it out to suit me.

"That stalwart and elderly Friend who led me to this choice point of observation is her father. The plump and motherly matron on the high seat, whose face alone is a remedy for care and worry, is her mother. They will invite me home with them when meeting is over. Already I see the tree-embowered farm-house, with its low, wide verandah, and old-fashioned roses climbing the lattice-work. In such a fragrant nook, or perhaps in the orchard back of the house, I shall explore the wonderland of this maiden's mind and heart. Beyond the innate reserve of an unsophisticated womanly nature there will be little reticence, and her thoughts will flow with the clearness and unpremeditation of the brook that I crossed on my way here. What a change they will be from the world's blotted page that I have read too exclusively of late!

"Perhaps it will appear to her that I have become smirched by these pages, and that my character has the aspect of a printer at the close of his day's tasks.

"This source of fear, however, is also a source of hope. If she has the quickness of intuition to discover that I know the world too well, she will also discern the truth that I would gladly escape from that which might eventually destroy my better nature, and that hers could be the hand which might rescue my manhood. To the degree that she is a genuine woman there will be fascination in the power of making a man more manly and worthy of respect. Especially will this be true if I have the supreme good-fortune not to offend her woman's fancy, and to excite her sympathy without awakening contempt.

"But I imagine I am giving her credit for more maturity of thought and discernment than her years permit. She must be young, and her experiences would give her no means of understanding my life. She will look at me with the frank, unsuspecting gaze of a child. She will exercise toward me that blessed phase of charity which thinketh no evil because ignorant of evil.

"Moreover, while I am familiar with the sin of the world, and have contributed my share toward it, I am not in love with it; and I can well believe that such a love as she might inspire would cause me to detest it. If for her sake and other good motives, I should resolutely and voluntarily turn my back on evil, would I not have the right to walk at the side of one who, by the goodness or her life, knows no evil? At any rate, I am not sufficiently magnanimous to forego the opportunity should it occur. Therefore, among the lengthening shadows of this June day I shall woo with my utmost skill one who may be able to banish the deeper shadows that are gathering around my life; and if I fail I shall carry the truth of her spring-time beauty and girlish innocence back to the city, and their memory will daily warn me to beware lest I lose the power to love and appreciate that which is her pre-eminent charm.

"But enough of that phase of the question. There need be no failure in my dream, however probable failure may be in reality. Let me imagine that in her lovely face I may detect the slight curiosity inspired by a stranger passing into interest. She will be shy and reserved at first; but as the delicious sense of being understood and admired gains mastery, her thoughts will gradually reveal her heart like the opening petals of a rose, and I can reverently gaze upon the rich treasures of which she is the unconscious possessor, and which I may win without impoverishing her.

"Her ready laugh, clear and mellow as the robin's song that woke me this morning, will be the index of an unfeigned spring of mirthfulness—of that breezy, piquant, laughing philosophy which gives to some women an indescribable charm, enabling them to render gloom and despondency rare inmates of the home over which they preside. When I recall what dark depths of perplexity and trouble my mother often hid with her light laugh, I remember that I have never yet had a chance even to approach her in heroism. In my dream, at least, I can give to my wife my mother's laugh and courage; and surely Nature, who has endowed yonder maiden with so much beauty, has also bestowed every suitable accompaniment. Wherefore I shall discover in her eyes treasures of sunshine that shall light my home on stormy days and winter nights.

"As I vary our theme of talk from bright to sad experiences, I shall catch a glimpse of that without which the world would become a desert—woman's sympathy. Possibly I may venture to suggest my own need, and emphasize it by a reference to Holy Writ. That would be appropriate in a Sunday wooing. Surely she would admit that if Adam

could not endure being alone in Eden, a like fate would be far more deserving of pity in such a wilderness as New York.

"Then, as a sequel to her sympathy, I may witness the awakening of that noble characteristic of woman—self-sacrifice—the generous impulse to give happiness, even though at cost to self.

"As the winged hours pass, and our glances, our words, our intuitions, and the subtle laws of magnetism that are so powerful, and yet so utterly beyond the ken of reason, reveal us to each other, I detect in the depths of her blue eyes a light which vanishes when I seek it, but returns again—a principle which she does not even recognize, much less understand, and yet which she already unconsciously obeys. Her looks are less frank and open, her manner grows deliciously shy, she hesitates and chooses her words, but is not so happy in their choice as when she spoke without premeditation. Instead of the wonted bloom on her cheek her colour comes and goes. Oh, most exquisite phase of human power! I control the fountain of her life; and by an act, a word, a glance even, can cause the crimson tide to rise even to her brow, and then to ebb, leaving her sad and pale. Joy! joy! I have won that out of which can be created the best thing of earth, and the type of heaven—a home!

At this supreme moment in my day-dream, an elderly Friend on the high seat gave his hand to another white-haired man who had, for the last hour, leaned his chin on his stout cane, and meditated under the shadow of his broad-rimmed hat, and our silent meeting was over. The possessor of the exquisite profile who had led me through a flight of romance such as I had never known before, turned and looked directly at me.

The breaking of my dream had been too sudden, and I had been caught too high up to alight again on the solid ground of reality with ease and grace. The night-editor blushed like a school-girl under her glance, at which she seemed naturally surprised. She, of course, could imagine no reason why her brief look of curiosity should cause me confusion and bring a guilty crimson to my face. I took it as a good omen, however, and said mentally, as I passed out with the others,

"My thoughts have already established a subtle influence over her, drawing her eyes and the first delicate tendril of interest toward one to whom she may cling for life."

CHAPTER III.—A SHINING TIDE.

As I was strenuously seeking to gain possession of my wits, so that I could avail myself of any opportunity that offered, or could be made by adroit, prompt action, the stalwart and elderly Friend, who had seemed thus far one of the ministers of my impending fate, again took my hand and said,

"I hope thee'll forgive me for asking thee to conform to our ways, and not think any rudeness was meant."

"The grasp of your hand at once taught me that you were friendly as well as a Friend," I replied.

"We should not belie our name, truly. I fear thee did not enjoy our silent meeting?"

"You are mistaken, sir. It was just the meeting which, as a weary man, I needed."

"I hope thee wasn't asleep?" he said, with a humorous twinkle in his honest blue eyes.

"You are quite mistaken again," I answered, smiling; but I should have been in a dilemma had he asked me if I had been dreaming.

"Thee's a stranger in these parts," he continued, in a manner that suggested kindness rather than curiosity.

"Possibly this is the day of my fate," I thought, "and this man the father of my ideal woman." And I decided to angle with my utmost skill for an invitation.

"You are correct," I replied, "and I much regret that I have wandered so far from my hotel, for I am not strong."

"Well, thee may have good cause to be sorry, though we do our best; but if thee's willing to put up with homely fare and homely people, thee's welcome to come home with us."

Seeing eager acquiescence in my face, he continued without giving me time to reply, "Here, mother, thee always provides enough for one more. We'll have a stranger within our gates to-day, perhaps."

To my joy the Friend lady, with a face like a benediction, turned at his words. At the same moment a large, three-seated rockaway, with a ruddy boy as a driver, drew up against the adjacent horse-block, while the fair unknown, who had stood among a bevy of young Quakeresses like a tall lily among lesser flowers, came toward us holding a little girl by the hand. The family group was drawing to, either according to my prophetic fancy, and my heart beat thick and fast. Truly this was the day of fate!

"Homely people," indeed I and what cared I for "fare" in the very hour of destiny!

"Mother," he said, with his humorous twinkle, "I'm bent on making amends to this stranger who seemed to have a drawing toward thy side of the house. Thee didn't give him any spiritual fare in the meeting-house, but I think thee'll do better by him at the farm-house. When I tell thee that he is not well and a long way from home, thee'll give him a welcome."

"Indeed, sir," said the old lady, taking my hand in her soft, plump palm, while her face fairly beamed with kindness, "it would be a poor faith that did not teach us our duty toward the stranger; and, if I mistake not, thee'll change our duty into a pleasure."

"Do not hope to entertain an angel," I said.

"That's well," the old gentleman put in; "our dinner will be rather too plain and substantial for angels' fare. I think thee'll be the better for it though."

"I am the better already for your most unexpected kindness, which I now gratefully accept as a stranger. I hope, however, that I may be able to win a more definite and personal regard," and I handed the old gentleman my card.

"Richard Morton is thy name, then. I'll place thee be-

side Ruth Yocomb, my wife. Come, mother, we're keeping Friend Jones's team from the block. My name is Thomas Yocomb. No, no, take the back seat by my wife. She may preach to thee a little going home. Drive on Reuben," he added, as he and his two daughters stepped quickly in, "and give Friend Jones a chance. This is Adah Yocomb, my daughter, and this is little Zillah. Mother thought that since the two names went together in Scripture they ought to go together out of it, and I am the last man in the world to go against the Scripture. That's Reuben Yocomb, driving. Now thee knows all the family, and I hope thee don't feel as much of a stranger as thee did;" and the hearty old man turned and beamed on me with a good-will that I felt to be as warm and genuine as the June sunshine.

"To be frank," I exclaimed, "I am at a loss to understand your kindness. In the city we are suspicious of strangers and stand aloof from them; but you treat me as if I had brought a cordial letter of introduction from one you esteemed highly."

"So thee has, so thee has; only the letter came before thee did. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers—that's the way it reads, doesn't it, mother?"

"Moreover, Richard Morton," his wife added, "thee has voluntarily come among us, and sat down with us for a quiet hour. Little claim to the faith of Abraham could we have should we let thee wander off to get thy dinner with the birds in the woods, for the village is miles away."

"Mother'll make amends to thee for the silent meeting," said Mr. Yocomb, looking around with an impressive nod.

"I trust she will," I replied. "I wanted to hear her preach. It was her kindly face that led to my blunder, for it so attracted me from my perch of observation on the wall that I acted on my impulse and followed her into the meeting-house, feeling in advance that I had found a friend."

"Well, I guess thee has, one of the old school," laughed her husband.

The daughter, Adah, turned and looked at me, while she smiled approvingly. Oh, blessed day of destiny! When did dream and reality so keep pace before? Was I not dreaming still, and imagining everything to suit my own fancy? When would the perverse world begin to assert itself?

Sitting just before me, on the next seat, so that I could often see the same perfect profile, was the maiden that I had already wooed and won in fancy. Though she was so near, and in the full sunlight, I could detect no cloudiness in her exquisite complexion, nor discover a fault in her rounded form. The slope of her shoulders was grace itself. Shedid not lean back weak or languidly, but sat erect, with the quiet, easy poise of vigour and health. Her smile was frank and friendly, and yet not as enchanting as I expected. It was an affair of facial muscles rather than the lighting up of the entire visage. Nor did her full face—now that my confusion had passed away and I was capable of close observation—give the same vivid impression of beauty made by her profile. It was pretty, very pretty, but for some reasons disappointing. Then I smiled at my half-conscious criticism, and thought, "You have imagined a creature of unearthly perfection, and expect your impossible ideal to be realized. Were she all that you have dreamed, she would be much too fine for an ordinary mortal like yourself. In her rich, unperturbed womanly nature you will find the beauty that will outlast that of form and feature."

"I fear thee found our silent meeting long and tedious," said Mrs. Yocomb, deprecatingly.

"I assure you I did not," I replied, "though I hoped you would have a message for us."

"It was not given to me," she said meekly. Then she added, "Those not used to our ways are troubled, perhaps, with wandering thoughts during these silent hours."

"I was not to-day," I replied with bowed head; "I found a subject that held mine."

"I'm glad," she said, her face kindling with pleasure.

"May I ask the nature of the truth that held thy meditations?"

"Perhaps I will tell you some time," I answered hesitatingly; then added reverently, "It was of a very sacred nature."

"Thee's right," she said, gravely. "Far be it from me to wish to look curiously upon thy soul's communion."

For a moment I felt guilty that I should have so misled her, but reassured myself with the thought, "That which I dwelt upon was as sacred to me as my mother's memory."

I changed the subject, and sought by every means in my power to lead her to talk, for thus, I thought, I shall learn the full source of womanly life from which the peerless daughter has drawn her nature.

The kind old lady needed but little incentive. Her thoughts flowed freely in a quaint, sweet vernacular that savoured of the meeting-house. I was both interested and charmed, and as we rode at a quiet jog through the June sunlight felt that I was in the hands of a kindly fate that, in accordance with the old fairy tales, was bent on giving one poor mortal all he desired.

At last, on a hillside sloping to the south, I saw the farm-house of my dream. Two tall honey locusts stood like faithful guardians on each side of the porch. An elm drooped over the farther end of the piazza. In the dooryard the foliage of two great silver poplar or aspen trees fluttered perpetually with its light abern. A maple towered high behind the house, and a brook that ran not far away was shadowed by a weeping willow. Other trees were grouped here and there as if Nature had planted them, and up one a wild grape-vine clambered, its unobtrusive blossoms filling the air with a fragrance more delicious even than that of the old-fashioned roses which abounded everywhere.

"Was there ever a sweeter nook?" I thought, as I stepped out on the wide horse-block, and gave my hand to one who seemed the beautiful culmination of the scene. Miss Adah needed but little assistance to alight, but she took my hand in hers, which she had ungloved as she approached her home. It was her mother's soft, plump hand, but unmarked, as yet,