

SELECT STORY.

True to Her Promise.

Chapter I.

AN IRASCIBLE PAPA.

FRANK WRIGHT and Amy Nobleef sat in Mr. Nobleef's parlour on the sofa.

There was no earthly necessity for them to sit on the sofa, for there were six or eight elegant chairs in the room, on which they could have sat and held any conversation, with the greatest propriety.

But there being no one in the room but themselves, if we may except a staring portrait of the father of his country that fact may be advanced as an excuse.

But, granted that they might both, at the same time, in the same place, besitting on the same sofa, is that any reason why Amy's right hand should have been contained between both of Frank's, except, perhaps, when he raised one of his to pat hers softly? Or does it offer the slightest pretext for an excuse that he should bend his head so very close to hers, to hear what she had to say, and, making a mistake in his auricular organ, present his lips instead of his ear?

But we must excuse them—they were young.

But, nevertheless, there seemed to be some trouble, inasmuch as Amy's pretty eyes were filled with tears, and Frank had a slightly troubled frown on his brow, of which the presence of a young good-looking lady, in a well furnished room could not possibly have been the cause.

Oh, Frank! I don't know what to do said Amy, after that young man had patted her hand for two minutes in succession, without saying a word.

Frank said nothing in reply.

I really don't know what to do, said Amy, in a sweetly despondent tone of voice.

It was such a low tone, too, that Frank, doubting whether he had heard aright, bent his head near to the pretty mouth from which the sounds proceeded, and again made that auricular mistake.

I don't see that we can do anything at present, Amy dear, except wait and be patient. Is your father so very obstinate?

As obstinate as an old bear! said Amy with some spirit.

This may have been wrong, but there are times, when a young lady's heart is interfered with, that the owner of that heart may become a confidential to the objects of its affections, and even filial respect may give way to youthful love.

Of course, it is exceedingly wrong, and much to be regretted, whenever such a feeling shows itself; but when a father—like Mr. Nobleef, for example—endeavours, upon a mere matter of opinion, as Mr. Nobleef was doing, to interfere between a young lady and her lover, by intimating to the lover that his attention to the daughter is a matter of dispute which can only be settled by the young gentleman's unconditional disappearance, it naturally creates a rebellious feeling in the young people's hearts, and ends in such uncompromising and undignified epithets as "old bear."

The fact of the matter was just this: Mr. Nobleef was a man of strong moral principles, but one who could never see any good in religion—who stoutly maintained that every individual man ought to be good—could be good if there were no ministers of the gospel continually telling him that he was hopelessly bad, and promulgating it, as his firm decision that his daughter, Amelia Elizabeth (Mr. Nobleef always used full names, and considered abbreviations silly and weak), should never enter into a matrimonial contract with any person who had any religious belief whatever.

But now, perversely and obstinately, and with a total disregard of all those well known and accepted ties called filial duties, his daughter had fallen desperately in love with a young man who was hopelessly attached to a church of God, and most vulgarly and defiantly (to Mr. Nobleef's mind) dared to prefer his suit, and call his daughter "Amy."

Mr. Nobleef's breath was for the time being taken away by this daring and unscrupulous conduct on the part of the young man; but as soon as he recovered that very necessary article towards a consummation of his indignant wrath, Mr. Nobleef expended it again on the head of the offender, and told him, in language that would have stirred a Julius Cæsar's heart with fear and shame, that his addresses were presumptuous, and not to be entertained a moment, neither by him, Mr. Nobleef, as father, nor by her, Amelia Elizabeth, as daughter; and that the sooner he rid the house of his obnoxious presence, the better.

And when Mr. Nobleef had come to this pass, having lost his breath again, and, in addition, being rather purple in the face, he indicated the unutterable indignation of his feelings by pounding

most vigorously on the table with his fist.

Now, it might naturally be expected that the young man should be overcome with shame and confusion, and should with meanness and humility, accept the just indignation of the father and his irrevocable decree.

And it is, furthermore, no more than natural to suppose that he should stammering, away down in his throat, acquiesce in the assertion of Mr. Nobleef the moral man, and seek to excuse his adherence to religion on the ground that it had been stamped upon his young mind in infancy, for which, of course, only his misguided parents, were to be held responsible; and that his belonging to the church need not trouble Mr. Nobleef the least particle, as he had been induced to join it merely through the misdirecting influence of his younger years, and through no calm reasoning of his own.

And, furthermore, it is but just to expect that Frank Wright would be stricken with remorse where he stood, and be covered with oceans of shame.

But now, contrary, to all accepted rules and regulations, and the whole list of precedents known and established, Mr. Frank Wright did exactly the opposite to what every proper young man should do; inasmuch as he received Mr. Nobleef's righteous ebullition of wrath with a very calm, although a slightly pale face, and a very exact bearing; and, instead of being enveloped in oceans of shame, the muddy waters did not even ripple over his feet.

His arms were silently folded, his head erect, his eye stern, his lip compressed.

Yet his attitude was respectful. He defended his religion, and, on the whole, comported himself in a very manly way.

The consequence was, that Mr. Nobleef's feelings were too much for him, and he flourished his arms in the air in a speechless manner, while Frank Wright respectfully bowed his way out, and looking for Amy in order to say good-bye, found her in the parlour.

The rest the reader knows.

After Amy had applied that powerful and heart relieving epithet, old bear, to her father, there were a few moments of silence, disturbed only by the distant and angry choking of Mr. Nobleef, who was but just recovering his breath.

Well, Amy, as I said before, all we can do is to have patience and wait. I do not wish to bind you, nor to ask you to do anything that is wrong. I hear your father coming, so, rather than have another scene, I will go; but I will wait for you.

And I will think of you long after you have forgotten me, Amy said.

She had probably read that expression in some book, but nevertheless she meant it.

Frank bent his head again, to hear her words the plainer, and, singularly enough, presented his lips instead of his ears.

Mr. Nobleef, having by this time recovered his breath, began to advance towards the room in which the lovers were, and then, with many a hurried pledge of being and remaining true they parted.

What's this nonsense? began Mr. Nobleef, as soon as he entered the room and found his daughter sitting on the sofa, with her head bowed down. What's this nonsense about Frank Wright? The fellow had the impudence to—

Mr. Nobleef was in danger of choking again, but he got over it. He actually had the impudence to ask me to permit him to address you seriously—him, with his sectarian and prejudiced ideas, and a moderate income at that! Now if he had been a man of means, there might have been a shadow of an excuse for his presumption; the idea! If he hadn't made such a dignified and swift exit, I'd have—I'd have—here he almost choked, but the satisfaction afforded by saying the next words relieved him—kicked him downstairs! Baring in mind that Mr. Nobleef had the gout in one foot, and his slippers on, this may be considered merely a figure of speech.

No! I have better views for you. You shall marry a man more worthy of you.

Amy here committed an unpardonable offence against that same law of filial respect and duty, by saying,—

I don't want anybody else.

What! cried Mr. Nobleef. What! Amy faintly repeated her words.

Mr. Nobleef was at first so astounded that he said nothing; but when he did say something, what a storm he did raise!

How his hand did come down on the table, and how his foot, (not the one with the gout in it) did stamp upon the floor!

When the storm had somewhat subsided, he came to a resolution—a stern resolution—a resolution that Amy should go in the country without delay, where that impetuous religious fellow could not place himself in the way of this foolish girl.

Amy offered a feeble protest, but her father merely looked at her.

That look was enough.

They went away in six days.

Chapter II.

MR. BROWN FROM BALTIMORE.

THEY had been in their new abode scarcely a week, when Mr. Nobleef one day brought a young man home to dine.

He was what would be called a handsome young man, even with a sort of sneer on his lip.

And though his moustache was red near the skin, and black at the ends, and there was a pervading air of the barber's shop about his head, still he had very beautiful hair, notwithstanding—taking some young ladies' estimates about these things.

Mr. Nobleef introduced this new guest as Mr. Brown from Baltimore.

Mr. Brown from Baltimore was correspondent for a paper, he said, and Mr. Brown from Baltimore would probably remain in the country near them some time, during which time, Mr. Brown from Baltimore, he expected, would call upon them very often.

Mr. Brown smiled, and murmured, looking at Miss Amy, he had no doubt he would.

Mr. Brown's upper lip acted as if it was a curtain whenever he smiled, by rolling up and disclosing his very white teeth.

When the curtain rolled up in this manner under his nose, he looked very cruel—or, worse, like a coward who is brought to bay—perhaps because his teeth looked so very even and white and sharp.

Amy did not like him at first sight, but was polite to him, as a lady ought to be.

But when he made it a regular thing thereafter to visit the house, and, moreover, to pretend to fall desperately in love with Amy, it was unendurable, and she wished her father had never brought Mr. Brown from Baltimore to the house.

Mr. Brown from Baltimore seemed to enjoy himself hugely, allowing the curtain to roll up almost continually, and making Amy positively sick of his white teeth.

What pained her more than all the rest was, whenever Mr. Nobleef and Mr. Brown from Baltimore were together they spent their time in reviling religion, laughing at the fools that belong to churches, mocking the things which to Amy seemed holiest, and condemning the superstition of the millions of people who were so ignorant as to believe in a heaven.

Evidently Mr. Nobleef liked the man very much, and favoured his attentions to his daughter.

His daughter, however, was anything but flattered by these attentions, and heartily longed for the time to come for them to go home, which Mr. Nobleef assured her would be in about a month.

The days dragged slowly along, during which Mr. Brown from Baltimore became a perfect shadow in Amy's path. He proposed and was refused.

He proposed and was refused again, and he kept on proposing as if that was his whole business in life.

Mr. Nobleef stormed and fretted and brought his influence to bear upon his refractory daughter, but all to no purpose.

Amy remained true to the promise she had made to Frank, and the time wore slowly but surely away.

Amy! said Mr. Nobleef one day.

Yes, pa, replied the daughter.

We take the next steamer for home to-morrow, so get your things ready. I had hoped you would have shown a little filial respect, but I see that my authority is entirely thrown away.

Oh, papa! please don't talk so.

There is no necessity in 'Oh, papa! I won't be 'Oh, papa!' Such an eligible and most desirable young man as Mr. Brown from Baltimore cannot be procured every day, for besides all his other accomplishments, he is very rich—very rich indeed—and—and—

Mr. Nobleef, being here in danger of choking, very wisely desisted from his harangue, and left the room.

Chapter III.

CONVERTED IN DANGER.

THE "Ocean Bird" lay ready to sail in Chesapeake Bay.

Mr. Nobleef, who was original in all his ideas, had decided to fly homewards with his daughter, under the wings of this amphibious fowl, and now stood upon the deck, watching the crowd of people running to and fro.

There was the usual scene of confusion—the inordinate haste of travellers rushing on, the unreasonable hurry of friends tumbling off, the unintelligible commands of the captain, and the monotonous responses of the sailors, the lazy flapping of the sails, the thin blue smoke, getting thicker and blacker every moment, curling up; and Amy Nobleef, leaning over the side of the vessel, felt an exhilarating sense of relief at leaving the beautiful country, with its persecution, in the shape of Mr. Brown of Baltimore.

But the sense of relief, however exhilarating, was destined to be short-lived; for while Amy was exulting quietly in her heart, and looking over the edge of the vessel, she discovered the obnoxious Mr. Brown from Baltimore with great

difficulty making his way on board. It was he, certainly, for he was waving his hand in a manner that could not be intended for anyone but herself.

She turned from this sign of familiarity, and walked into the cabin, where she found her father reading the daily paper.

Father!

Well?

I thought we were to travel alone.

How alone?

Why, with no else that knew us; and here Mr. Brown is coming. I hope he is not going with us.

Your hopes, I am sorry to say, are doomed to disappointment. Mr. Brown from Baltimore is certainly going with us; what's more, he goes on my invitation; 'my invitation,' mark you, miss; and, what is still more, I wish to see him treated with becoming respect.

Amy withdrew from her father, and went to her state-room in disgust.

If she had ever longed for Frank Wright since she had been parted from him, it was at that moment.

While sitting there moody and depressed, she happened to think that Mr. Nobleef might call her, in order to have her entertain Mr. Brown, which, in the state of mind she was in, was a sheer impossibility.

So she escaped from the state-room by another door and went on deck again.

In her disappointment she had not noticed that the "Ocean Bird" had spread its wings and was flying on its way.

But such was the case, and "Maryland, my Maryland," was now nothing but a dim line of horizon in the distance.

Amy took a seat on an upturned bucket, and looked at the receding land behind her, and then, at the waste of water before her, and then allowing her mind to wander upon the subject that was uppermost in it, she bent her head, looked down at her feet, and thought of Frank Wright, and how she wished he was with her: of Mr. Brown of Baltimore and wondered when she would be rid of him; of her father and his atheistic views, and, finally, of herself, and what she would do about it all.

Not being able to form any resolution, she began at the beginning and thought it all over again.

While she sat there thinking thus, she raised her eyes a little, and glanced along the deck.

As she did so, she saw a pair of feet approaching.

Singular! the shape of those feet was very familiar.

They were not Mr. Nobleef's, for his were broad and flat, and had a certain obstinate "I-know-better" look about them that was characteristic of the whole man.

They were not those of Mr. Brown from Baltimore, for his were long, and knobby where his corns and bunions protruded.

The feet came nearer, and suddenly stopped.

Very strange that they should stop right before her!

Stranger still that, as she looked higher, she discovered something very familiar in the shape of the pantaloons and the out of the coat, and, most strange of all, as she looked higher, she saw a face smiling joyfully, a pair of hands outstretched, and heard a glad voice (oh, so familiar!) say,—

Amy—darling Amy—is it you, indeed?

Oh, Frank! cried Amy, jumping up. How did you come here! I'm so glad to see you!

No more than I am to see you, dear, answered Frank. But I should ask you and not you me, how did you come here?

Amy hurriedly explained how she and her father and Mr. Brown of Baltimore, had come to use the accommodation of the "Ocean Bird."

And now tell me how you came to be here, said Amy, when she had finished.

Why, I am owner of this vessel, said Frank.

What! cried Amy, opening her bright eyes widely, owner of the vessel?

Yes, replied Frank. I have been prospered since I saw you last. I have worked extra hard for your sake, too. I hope my Amy is still my own.

Still your own, Frank—always your own.

Indeed! growled a very gruff voice behind them. Indeed!

They turned, and beheld Mr. Nobleef with a tremendous scowl on his forehead.

So you've turned up again, have you? said Mr. Nobleef, addressing Frank.

I have never yet turned down, replied Frank.

Sir, impudence to older folks is one of the most unbecoming and shameful things that a young man can be guilty of. I am very sorry to see it in you, sir.

Mr. Nobleef was on the point of saying more, but just at that moment Mr. Brown from Baltimore came rushing wildly up, with an exceedingly pale face.

They also went off together hastily.

Amy wondered what it all meant.

Her wonder increased as she saw an excited running amongst the sailors.

She had remained alone for about ten minutes, and the suspense became almost unendurable, when Frank at last came back to her, and said,—

Amy, dear.

What, Frank?

Can you bear bad news?

Oh, yes; please tell me what it is. I can bear it a great deal better than this suspense.

The ship has sprung a leak.

So it had, and it was fast going down. So fast, indeed, that they could not reach the shore, though they tried, and the command was given to lower the boats.

This was done, and, amidst some confusion, the passengers were helped off.

But there were not boats enough, and when they were all full, and all were pushed off but the last one, the four travellers were still on board with the captain, who, as all good captains should, stuck to the ship.

Room for one more, shouted an old tar from below. Here's room for the laddy.

I won't go, Frank, cried Amy. I won't leave you to die alone.

Oh! then let me go in your place, said Mr. Brown from Baltimore, rushing forward with an ashen face; and before he could be prevented, he had scrambled down and was in the boat.

The boat pushed off, and Amy and her father and Mr. Wright were left upon the sinking ship.

Frank Wright and Amy Nobleef, folded in each other's arms, calmly awaited the inevitable.

But what did Mr. Nobleef do?

He went down on his knees and prayed.

Forgetting all his life-long principles, and thinking nothing of the number of times that he had mocked religion, with Mr. Brown from Baltimore to help him he actually lifted up his voice in prayers for help.

And that is what the most of those free-thinkers of the world would do when brought into a similar strait.

The captain said nothing, but paced up and down, with his telescope raised to his eye, every now and then, or muttering emphatical sentences about the pumps, which were out of order, and would not work, while the ship went slowly surely down.

They waited with that dull agony that only those feel when death is staring in the face.

The boats were out of sight now, and nothing could be seen but the wide expanse of heaven and water.

Ah! said the captain.

He had the telescope to his eye, and was looking intently in one direction.

They looked that way some minutes, they could discover a little white speck.

As it came nearer, they saw that it was the sail of an approaching vessel.

It came nearer and nearer, but oh so slowly.

It was a terrible suspense—this being in the jaws of death with a chance of relief in sight.

The distant sails were nearer, and became more distinct.

The captain began his signals of distress.

Ah! they were seen at last, for the distant vessel answered the signals and came swiftly on.

At last it came, and not a bit too soon for the four companions in peril had scarcely been rescued five minutes when the "Ocean Bird" folded her wings, and went down from the sight of man for ever.

But now what did Mr. Nobleef do as soon as he came on board the "Sultan," which had rescued them.

He got down on his knees and gave thanks—he actually did.

Amy, said Mr. Nobleef, twenty minutes thereafter.

What papa?

Mr. Brown of Baltimore.

This being neither a question nor an assertion, Amy did not know what to say; so she said nothing.

He is a coward, said Mr. Nobleef, fiercely; and I'm glad I found it out. So was Amy.

And Amy, I have so far altered my opinion in regard to Frank, who, I must say, acted bravely; that I have no objection to his calling on us when we get home.

And then, there being a possibility of their not getting home, as the "Sultan" might also spring a leak, or burn up, or some such thing, Mr. Nobleef began to pray again, and prayed till he got on shore.

And after that he was never heard to sneer at religion again.

When Mr. Brown from Baltimore, hearing that they had been rescued, called upon them to congratulate them, he was dismissed ignominiously from the door by the servant, and has never shown his face there since.

And soon thereafter, Amy Nobleef, as Mrs. Wright, embarked on the voyage of life with Mr. Frank, protected forevermore from all the Mr. Browns in Baltimore.