GEORGE CABLE

DR. SEVIER

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I.
THE DOCTOR

The main road to wealth in New Orleans has long been Carondelet street. There you see the most alert faces; noses – it seems to one – with more and sharper edge, and eyes smaller and brighter and with less distance between them than one notices in other streets. It is there that the stock and bond brokers hurry to and fro and run together promiscuously – the cunning and the simple, the headlong and the wary – at the four clanging strokes of the Stock Exchange gong. There rises the tall façade of the Cotton Exchange. Looking in from the sidewalk as you pass, you see its main hall, thronged but decorous, the quiet engine-room of the surrounding city's most far-reaching occupation, and at the hall's farther end you descry the "Future Room," and hear the unearthly ramping and bellowing of the bulls and bears. Up and down the street, on either hand, are the ship-brokers and insurers, and in the upper stories foreign consuls among a multitude of lawyers and notaries.

In 1856 this street was just assuming its present character.

The cotton merchants were making it their favorite place of commercial domicile. The open thoroughfare served in lieu of the present exchanges; men made fortunes standing on the curb-stone, and during bank hours the sidewalks were perpetually crowded with cotton factors, buyers, brokers, weighers, reweighers, classers, pickers, pressers, and samplers, and the air was laden with cotton quotations and prognostications.

Number 3½, second floor, front, was the office of Dr. Sevier. This office was convenient to everything. Immediately under its windows lay the sidewalks where congregated the men who, of all in New Orleans, could best afford to pay for being sick, and least desired to die. Canal street, the city's leading artery, was just below, at the near left-hand corner. Beyond it lay the older town, not yet impoverished in those days, – the French quarter. A single square and a half off at the right, and in plain view from the front windows, shone the dazzling white walls of the St. Charles Hotel, where the nabobs of the river plantations came and dwelt with their fair-handed wives in seasons of peculiar anticipation, when it is well to be near the highest medical skill. In the opposite direction a three minutes' quick drive around the upper corner and down Common street carried the Doctor to his ward in the great Charity Hospital, and to the school of medicine, where he filled the chair set apart to the holy ailments of maternity. Thus, as it were, he laid his left hand on the rich and his right on the poor; and he was not left-handed.

Not that his usual attitude was one of benediction. He stood

straight up in his austere pure-mindedness, tall, slender, pale, sharp of voice, keen of glance, stern in judgment, aggressive in debate, and fixedly untender everywhere, except – but always except – in the sick chamber. His inner heart was all of flesh; but his demands for the rectitude of mankind pointed out like the muzzles of cannon through the embrasures of his virtues. To demolish evil! – that seemed the finest of aims; and even as a physician, that was, most likely, his motive until later years and a better self-knowledge had taught him that to do good was still finer and better. He waged war – against malady. To fight; to stifle; to cut down; to uproot; to overwhelm; – these were his springs of action. That their results were good proved that his sentiment of benevolence was strong and high; but it was well-nigh shut out of sight by that impatience of evil which is very fine and knightly in youngest manhood, but which we like to see give way to kindlier moods as the earlier heat of the blood begins to pass.

He changed in later years; this was in 1856. To "resist not evil" seemed to him then only a rather feeble sort of knavery. To face it in its nakedness, and to inveigh against it in high places and low, seemed the consummation of all manliness; and manliness was the key-note of his creed. There was no other necessity in this life.

"But a man must live," said one of his kindred, to whom, truth to tell, he had refused assistance.

"No, sir; that is just what he can't do. A man must die! So,

while he lives, let him be a man!"

How inharmonious a setting, then, for Dr. Sevier, was 3½ Carondelet street! As he drove, each morning, down to that point, he had to pass through long, irregular files of fellow-beings thronging either sidewalk, – a sadly unchivalric grouping of men whose daily and yearly life was subordinated only and entirely to the getting of wealth, and whose every eager motion was a repetition of the sinister old maxim that "Time is money."

"It's a great deal more, sir; it's life!" the Doctor always retorted.

Among these groups, moreover, were many who were all too well famed for illegitimate fortune. Many occupations connected with the handling of cotton yielded big harvests in perquisites. At every jog of the Doctor's horse, men came to view whose riches were the outcome of semi-respectable larceny. It was a day of reckless operation; much of the commerce that came to New Orleans was simply, as one might say, beached in Carondelet street. The sight used to keep the long, thin, keen-eyed doctor in perpetual indignation.

"Look at the wreckers!" he would say.

It was breakfast at eight, indignation at nine, dyspepsia at ten.

So his setting was not merely inharmonious; it was damaging. He grew sore on the whole matter of money-getting.

"Yes, I have money. But I don't go after it. It comes to me, because I seek and render service for the service's sake. It will come to anybody else the same way; and why should it come any

other way?"

He not only had a low regard for the motives of most seekers of wealth; he went further, and fell into much disbelief of poor men's needs. For instance, he looked upon a man's inability to find employment, or upon a poor fellow's run of bad luck, as upon the placarded woes of a hurdy-gurdy beggar.

"If he wants work he will find it. As for begging, it ought to be easier for any true man to starve than to beg."

The sentiment was ungentle, but it came from the bottom of his belief concerning himself, and a longing for moral greatness in all men.

"However," he would add, thrusting his hand into his pocket and bringing out his purse, "I'll help any man to make himself useful. And the sick – well, the sick, as a matter of course. Only I must know what I'm doing."

Have some of us known Want? To have known her – though to love her was impossible – is "a liberal education." The Doctor was learned; but this acquaintanceship, this education, he had never got. Hence his untenderness. Shall we condemn the fault? Yes. And the man? We have not the face. To be *just*, which he never knowingly failed to be, and at the same time to feel tenderly for the unworthy, to deal kindly with the erring, – it is a double grace that hangs not always in easy reach even of the tallest. The Doctor attained to it – but in later years; meantime, this story – which, I believe, had he ever been poor would never have been written.

CHAPTER II.
A YOUNG STRANGER

In 1856 New Orleans was in the midst of the darkest ten years of her history. Yet she was full of new-comers from all parts of the commercial world, – strangers seeking livelihood. The ravages of cholera and yellow-fever, far from keeping them away, seemed actually to draw them. In the three years 1853, '54, and '55, the cemeteries had received over thirty-five thousand dead; yet here, in 1856, besides shiploads of European immigrants, came hundreds of unacclimated youths, from all parts of the United States, to fill the wide gaps which they imagined had been made in the ranks of the great exporting city's clerking force.

Upon these pilgrims Dr. Sevier cast an eye full of interest, and often of compassion hidden under outward impatience. "Who wants to see," he would demand, "men —*and women*– increasing the risks of this uncertain life?" But he was also full of respect for them. There was a certain nobility rightly attributable to emigration itself in the abstract. It was the cutting loose from friends and aid, – those sweet-named temptations, – and the going forth into self-appointed exile and into dangers known and unknown, trusting to the help of one's own right hand to exchange honest toil for honest bread and raiment. His eyes kindled to see the goodly, broad, red-cheeked fellows. Sometimes, though, he

saw women, and sometimes tender women, by their side; and that sight touched the pathetic chord of his heart with a rude twangle that vexed him.

It was on a certain bright, cool morning early in October that, as he drove down Carondelet street toward his office, and one of those little white omnibuses of the old Apollo-street line, crowding in before his carriage, had compelled his driver to draw close in by the curb-stone and slacken speed to a walk, his attention chanced to fall upon a young man of attractive appearance, glancing stranger-wise and eagerly at signs and entrances while he moved down the street. Twice, in the moment of the Doctor's enforced delay, he noticed the young stranger make inquiry of the street's more accustomed frequenters, and that in each case he was directed farther on. But, the way opened, the Doctor's horse switched his tail and was off, the stranger was left behind, and the next moment the Doctor stepped across the sidewalk and went up the stairs of Number 3½ to his office. Something told him – we are apt to fall into thought on a stairway – that the stranger was looking for a physician.

He had barely disposed of the three or four waiting messengers that arose from their chairs against the corridor wall, and was still reading the anxious lines left in various handwritings on his slate, when the young man entered. He was of fair height, slenderly built, with soft auburn hair, a little untrimmed, neat dress, and a diffident, yet expectant and courageous, face.

"Dr. Sevier?"

"Yes, sir."

"Doctor, my wife is very ill; can I get you to come at once and see her?"

"Who is her physician?"

"I have not called any; but we must have one now."

"I don't know about going at once. This is my hour for being in the office. How far is it, and what's the trouble?"

"We are only three squares away, just here in Custom-house street." The speaker began to add a faltering enumeration of some very grave symptoms. The Doctor noticed that he was slightly deaf; he uttered his words as though he did not hear them.

"Yes," interrupted Dr. Sevier, speaking half to himself as he turned around to a standing case of cruel-looking silver-plated things on shelves; "that's a small part of the penalty women pay for the doubtful honor of being our mothers. I'll go. What is your number? But you had better drive back with me if you can." He drew back from the glass case, shut the door, and took his hat.

"Narcisse!"

On the side of the office nearest the corridor a door let into a hall-room that afforded merely good space for the furniture needed by a single accountant. The Doctor had other interests besides those of his profession, and, taking them altogether, found it necessary, or at least convenient, to employ continuously the services of a person to keep his accounts and collect his bills. Through the open door the book-keeper could be seen sitting on a high stool at a still higher desk, – a young man of handsome

profile and well-knit form. At the call of his name he unwound his legs from the rounds of the stool and leaped into the Doctor's presence with a superlatively high-bred bow.

"I shall be back in fifteen minutes," said the Doctor. "Come, Mr. – ," and went out with the stranger.

Narcisse had intended to speak. He stood a moment, then lifted the last half inch of a cigarette to his lips, took a long, meditative inhalation, turned half round on his heel, dashed the remnant with fierce emphasis into a spittoon, ejected two long streams of smoke from his nostrils, and extending his fist toward the door by which the Doctor had gone out, said: —

"All right, ole hoss!" No, not that way. It is hard to give his pronunciation by letter. In the word "right" he substituted an a for the r, sounding it almost in the same instant with the i, yet distinct from it: "All a-ight, ole hoss!"

Then he walked slowly back to his desk, with that feeling of relief which some men find in the renewal of a promissory note, twined his legs again among those of the stool, and, adding not a word, resumed his pen.

The Doctor's carriage was hurrying across Canal street.

"Dr. Sevier," said the physician's companion, "I don't know what your charges are" —

"The highest," said the Doctor, whose dyspepsia was gnawing him just then with fine energy. The curt reply struck fire upon the young man.

"I don't propose to drive a bargain, Dr. Sevier!" He flushed

angrily after he had spoken, breathed with compressed lips, and winked savagely, with the sort of indignation that school-boys show to a harsh master.

The physician answered with better self-control.

"What do you propose?"

"I was going to propose – being a stranger to you, sir – to pay in advance." The announcement was made with a tremulous, but triumphant, *hauteur*, as though it must cover the physician with mortification. The speaker stretched out a rather long leg, and, drawing a pocket-book, produced a twenty-dollar piece.

The Doctor looked full in his face with impatient surprise, then turned his eyes away again as if he restrained himself, and said, in a subdued tone: —

"I would rather you had haggled about the price."

"I don't hear" – said the other, turning his ear.

The Doctor waved his hand: —

"Put that up, if you please."

The young stranger was disconcerted. He remained silent for a moment, wearing a look of impatient embarrassment. He still extended the piece, turning it over and over with his thumb-nail as it lay on his fingers.

"You don't know me, Doctor," he said. He got another cruel answer.

"We're getting acquainted," replied the physician.

The victim of the sarcasm bit his lip, and protested, by an unconscious, sidewise jerk of the chin: —

"I wish you'd" – and he turned the coin again.

The physician dropped an eagle's stare on the gold.

"I don't practise medicine on those principles."

"But, Doctor," insisted the other, appeasingly, "you can make an exception if you will. Reasons are better than rules, my old professor used to say. I am here without friends, or letters, or credentials of any sort; this is the only recommendation I can offer."

"Don't recommend you at all; anybody can do that."

The stranger breathed a sigh of overtasked patience, smiled with a baffled air, seemed once or twice about to speak, but doubtful what to say, and let his hand sink.

"Well, Doctor," – he rested his elbow on his knee, gave the piece one more turn over, and tried to draw the physician's eye by a look of boyish pleasantness, – "I'll not ask you to take pay in advance, but I will ask you to take care of this money for me. Suppose I should lose it, or have it stolen from me, or – Doctor, it would be a real comfort to me if you would."

"I can't help that. I shall treat your wife, and then send in my bill." The Doctor folded arms and appeared to give attention to his driver. But at the same time he asked: —

"Not subject to epilepsy, eh?"

"No, sir!" The indignant shortness of the retort drew no sign of attention from the Doctor; he was silently asking himself what this nonsense meant. Was it drink, or gambling, or a confidence game? Or was it only vanity, or a mistake of inexperience? He

turned his head unexpectedly, and gave the stranger's facial lines a quick, thorough examination. It startled them from a look of troubled meditation. The physician as quickly turned away again.

"Doctor," began the other, but added no more.

The physician was silent. He turned the matter over once more in his mind. The proposal was absurdly unbusiness-like. That his part in it might look ungenerous was nothing; so his actions were right, he rather liked them to bear a hideous aspect: that was his war-paint. There was that in the stranger's attitude that agreed fairly with his own theories of living. A fear of debt, for instance, if that was genuine it was good; and, beyond and better than that, a fear of money. He began to be more favorably impressed.

"Give it to me," he said, frowning; "mark you, this is your way," – he dropped the gold into his vest-pocket, – "it isn't mine."

The young man laughed with visible relief, and rubbed his knee with his somewhat too delicate hand. The Doctor examined him again with a milder glance.

"I suppose you think you've got the principles of life all right, don't you?"

"Yes, I do," replied the other, taking his turn at folding arms.

"H-m-m! I dare say you do. What you lack is the practice." The Doctor sealed his utterance with a nod.

The young man showed amusement; more, it may be, than he felt, and presently pointed out his lodging-place.

"Here, on this side; Number 40;" and they alighted.

CHAPTER III.
HIS WIFE

In former times the presence in New Orleans, during the cooler half of the year, of large numbers of mercantile men from all parts of the world, who did not accept the fever-plagued city as their permanent residence, made much business for the renters of furnished apartments. At the same time there was a class of persons whose residence was permanent, and to whom this letting of rooms fell by an easy and natural gravitation; and the most respectable and comfortable rented rooms of which the city could boast were those *chambres garnies* in Custom-house and Bienville streets, kept by worthy free or freed mulatto or quadroon women.

In 1856 the gala days of this half-caste people were quite over. Difference was made between virtue and vice, and the famous quadroon balls were shunned by those who aspired to respectability, whether their whiteness was nature or only toilet powder. Generations of domestic service under ladies of Gallic blood had brought many of them to a supreme pitch of excellence as housekeepers. In many cases money had been inherited; in other cases it had been saved up. That Latin feminine ability to hold an awkward position with impregnable serenity, and, like the yellow Mississippi, to give back no reflection from the

overhanging sky, emphasized this superior fitness. That bright, womanly business ability that comes of the same blood added again to their excellence. Not to be home itself, nothing could be more like it than were the apartments let by Madame Cécile, or Madame Sophie, or Madame Athalie, or Madame Polyxène, or whatever the name might be.

It was in one of these houses, that presented its dull brick front directly upon the sidewalk of Custom-house street, with the unfailing little square sign of *Chambres à louer* (Rooms to let), dangling by a string from the overhanging balcony and twirling in the breeze, that the sick wife lay. A waiting slave-girl opened the door as the two men approached it, and both of them went directly upstairs and into a large, airy room. On a high, finely carved, and heavily hung mahogany bed, to which the remaining furniture corresponded in ancient style and massiveness, was stretched the form of a pale, sweet-faced little woman.

The proprietress of the house was sitting beside the bed, – a quadroon of good, kind face, forty-five years old or so, tall and broad. She rose and responded to the Doctor's silent bow with that pretty dignity of greeting which goes with all French blood, and remained standing. The invalid stirred.

The physician came forward to the bedside. The patient could not have been much over nineteen years of age. Her face was very pleasing; a trifle slender in outline; the brows somewhat square, not wide; the mouth small. She would not have been called beautiful, even in health, by those who lay stress on correctness

of outlines. But she had one thing that to some is better. Whether it was in the dark blue eyes that were lifted to the Doctor's with a look which changed rapidly from inquiry to confidence, or in the fine, scarcely perceptible strands of pale-brown hair that played about her temples, he did not make out; but, for one cause or another, her face was of that kind which almost any one has seen once or twice, and no one has seen often, – that seems to give out a soft, but veritable, light.

She was very weak. Her eyes quickly dropped away from his, and turned wearily, but peacefully, to those of her husband.

The Doctor spoke to her. His greeting and gentle inquiry were full of a soothing quality that was new to the young man. His long fingers moved twice or thrice softly across her brow, pushing back the thin, waving strands, and then he sat down in a chair, continuing his kind, direct questions. The answers were all bad.

He turned his glance to the quadroon; she understood it; the patient was seriously ill. The nurse responded with a quiet look of comprehension. At the same time the Doctor disguised from the young strangers this interchange of meanings by an audible question to the quadroon.

"Have I ever met you before?"

"No, seh."

"What is your name?"

"Zénobie."

"Madame Zénobie," softly whispered the invalid, turning her eyes, with a glimmer of feeble pleasantry, first to the quadroon

and then to her husband.

The physician smiled at her an instant, and then gave a few concise directions to the quadroon. "Get me" – thus and so.

The woman went and came. She was a superior nurse, like so many of her race. So obvious, indeed, was this, that when she gently pressed the young husband an inch or two aside, and murmured that "de doctah" wanted him to "go h-out," he left the room, although he knew the physician had not so indicated.

By-and-by he returned, but only at her beckon, and remained at the bedside while Madame Zénobie led the Doctor into another room to write his prescription.

"Who are these people?" asked the physician, in an undertone, looking up at the quadroon, and pausing with the prescription half torn off.

She shrugged her large shoulders and smiled perplexedly.

"Mizzez – Reechin?" The tone was one of query rather than assertion. "Dey sesso," she added.

She might nurse the lady like a mother, but she was not going to be responsible for the genuineness of a stranger's name.

"Where are they from?"

"I dunno? – Some pless? – I nevva yeh dat nem biffo?"

She made a timid attempt at some word ending in "walk," and smiled, ready to accept possible ridicule.

"Milwaukee?" asked the Doctor.

She lifted her palm, smiled brightly, pushed him gently with the tip of one finger, and nodded. He had hit the nail on the head.

"What business is he in?"

The questioner arose.

She cast a sidelong glance at him with a slight enlargement of her eyes, and, compressing her lips, gave her head a little, decided shake. The young man was not employed.

"And has no money either, I suppose," said the physician, as they started again toward the sick-room.

She shrugged again and smiled; but it came to her mind that the Doctor might be considering his own interests, and she added, in a whisper: —

"Dey pay me."

She changed places with the husband, and the physician and he passed down the stairs together in silence.

"Well, Doctor?" said the young man, as he stood, prescription in hand, before the carriage-door.

"Well," responded the physician, "you should have called me sooner."

The look of agony that came into the stranger's face caused the Doctor instantly to repent his hard speech.

"You don't mean" – exclaimed the husband.

"No, no; I don't think it's too late. Get that prescription filled and give it to Mrs. – "

"Richling," said the young man.

"Let her have perfect quiet," continued the Doctor. "I shall be back this evening."

And when he returned she had improved.

She was better again the next day, and the next; but on the fourth she was in a very critical state. She lay quite silent during the Doctor's visit, until he, thinking he read in her eyes a wish to say something to him alone, sent her husband and the quadroon out of the room on separate errands at the same moment. And immediately she exclaimed: —

"Doctor, save my life! You mustn't let me die! Save me, for my husband's sake! To lose all he's lost for me, and then to lose me too – save me, Doctor! save me!"

"I'm going to do it!" said he. "You shall get well!"

And what with his skill and her endurance it turned out so.

CHAPTER IV.
CONVALESCENCE AND ACQUAINTANCE

A man's clothing is his defence; but with a woman all dress is adornment. Nature decrees it; adornment is her instinctive delight. And, above all, the adorning of a bride; it brings out so charmingly the meaning of the thing. Therein centres the gay consent of all mankind and womankind to an innocent, sweet apostasy from the ranks of both. The value of living – which is loving; the sacredest wonders of life; all that is fairest and of best delight in thought, in feeling, yea, in substance, – all are apprehended under the floral crown and hymeneal veil. So, when at length one day Mrs. Richling said, "Madame Zénobie, don't you think I might sit up?" it would have been absurd to doubt the quadroon's willingness to assist her in dressing. True, here was neither wreath nor veil, but here was very young wifehood, and its re-attiring would be like a proclamation of victory over the malady that had striven to put two hearts asunder. Her willingness could hardly be doubted, though she smiled irresponsibly, and said: —

"If you thing" – She spread her eyes and elbows suddenly in the manner of a crab, with palms turned upward and thumbs outstretched – "Well!" – and so dropped them.

"You don't want wait till de doctah comin'?" she asked.

"I don't think he's coming; it's after his time."

"Yass?"

The woman was silent a moment, and then threw up one hand again, with the forefinger lifted alertly forward.

"I make a lill fi' biffo."

She made a fire. Then she helped the convalescent to put on a few loose drapings. She made no concealment of the enjoyment it gave her, though her words were few, and generally were answers to questions; and when at length she brought from the wardrobe, pretending not to notice her mistake, a loose and much too ample robe of woollen and silken stuffs to go over all, she moved as though she trod on holy ground, and distinctly felt, herself, the thrill with which the convalescent, her young eyes beaming their assent, let her arms into the big sleeves, and drew about her small form the soft folds of her husband's morning-gown.

"He goin' to fine that droll," said the quadroon.

The wife's face confessed her pleasure.

"It's as much mine as his," she said.

"Is you mek dat?" asked the nurse, as she drew its silken cord about the convalescent's waist.

"Yes. Don't draw it tight; leave it loose – so; but you can tie the knot tight. That will do; there!" She smiled broadly. "Don't tie me in as if you were tying me in forever."

Madame Zénobie understood perfectly, and, smiling in response, did tie it as if she were tying her in forever.

Half an hour or so later the quadroon, being – it may have been by chance – at the street door, ushered in a person who simply bowed in silence.

But as he put one foot on the stair he paused, and, bending a severe gaze upon her, asked: —

"Why do you smile?"

She folded her hands limply on her bosom, and drawing a cheek and shoulder toward each other, replied: —

"Nuttin'" —

The questioner's severity darkened.

"Why do you smile at nothing?"

She laid the tips of her fingers upon her lips to compose them.

"You din come in you' carridge. She goin' to thing 'tis Miché Reechin." The smile forced its way through her fingers. The visitor turned in quiet disdain and went upstairs, she following.

At the top he let her pass. She led the way and, softly pushing open the chamber-door, entered noiselessly, turned, and, as the other stepped across the threshold, nestled her hands one on the other at her waist, shrank inward with a sweet smile, and waved one palm toward the huge, blue-hung mahogany four-poster, – empty.

The visitor gave a slight double nod and moved on across the carpet. Before a small coal fire, in a grate too wide for it, stood a broad, cushioned rocking-chair, with the corner of a pillow showing over its top. The visitor went on around it. The girlish form lay in it, with eyes closed, very still; but

his professional glance quickly detected the false pretence of slumber. A slippered foot was still slightly reached out beyond the bright colors of the long gown, and toward the brazen edge of the hearth-pan, as though the owner had been touching her tiptoe against it to keep the chair in gentle motion. One cheek was on the pillow; down the other curled a few light strands of hair that had escaped from her brow.

Thus for an instant. Then a smile began to wreath about the corner of her lips; she faintly stirred, opened her eyes – and lo! Dr. Sevier, motionless, tranquil, and grave.

"O Doctor!" The blood surged into her face and down upon her neck. She put her hands over her eyes, and her face into the pillow. "O Doctor!" – rising to a sitting posture, – "I thought, of course, it was my husband."

The Doctor replied while she was speaking: —

"My carriage broke down." He drew a chair toward the fireplace, and asked, with his face toward the dying fire: —

"How are you feeling to-day, madam, – stronger?"

"Yes; I can almost say I'm well." The blush was still on her face as he turned to receive her answer, but she smiled with a bright courageousness that secretly amused and pleased him. "I thank you, Doctor, for my recovery; I certainly should thank you." Her face lighted up with that soft radiance which was its best quality, and her smile became half introspective as her eyes dropped from his, and followed her outstretched hand as it rearranged the farther edges of the dressing-gown one upon another.

"If you will take better care of yourself hereafter, madam," responded the Doctor, thumping and brushing from his knee some specks of mud that he may have got when his carriage broke down, "I will thank you. But" – brush – brush – "I – doubt it."

"Do you think you should?" she asked, leaning forward from the back of the great chair and letting her wrists drop over the front of its broad arms.

"I do," said the Doctor, kindly. "Why shouldn't I? This present attack was by your own fault." While he spoke he was looking into her eyes, contracted at their corners by her slight smile. The face was one of those that show not merely that the world is all unknown to them, but that it always will be so. It beamed with inquisitive intelligence, and yet had the innocence almost of infancy. The Doctor made a discovery; that it was this that made her beautiful. "She *is* beautiful," he insisted to himself when his critical faculty dissented.

"You needn't doubt me, Doctor. I'll try my best to take care. Why, of course I will, – for John's sake." She looked up into his face from the tassel she was twisting around her finger, touching the floor with her slippers' toe and faintly rocking.

"Yes, there's a chance there," replied the grave man, seemingly not overmuch pleased; "I dare say everything you do or leave undone is for his sake."

The little wife betrayed for a moment a pained perplexity, and then exclaimed: —

"Well, of course!" and waited his answer with bright eyes.

"I have known women to think of their own sakes," was the response.

She laughed, and with unprecedented sparkle replied: —

"Why, whatever's his sake is my sake. I don't see the difference. Yes, I see, of course, how there might be a difference; but I don't see how a woman" – She ceased, still smiling, and, dropping her eyes to her hands, slowly stroked one wrist and palm with the tassel of her husband's robe.

The Doctor rose, turned his back to the mantel-piece, and looked down upon her. He thought of the great, wide world: its thorny ways, its deserts, its bitter waters, its unrighteousness, its self-seeking greeds, its weaknesses, its under and over reaching, its unfaithfulness; and then again of this – child, thrust all at once a thousand miles into it, with never – so far as he could see – an implement, a weapon, a sense of danger, or a refuge; well pleased with herself, as it seemed, lifted up into the bliss of self-obliterating wifehood, and resting in her husband with such an assurance of safety and happiness as a saint might pray for grace to show to Heaven itself. He stood silent, feeling too grim to speak, and presently Mrs. Richling looked up with a sudden liveliness of eye and a smile that was half apology and half persistence.

"Yes, Doctor, I'm going to take care of myself."

"Mrs. Richling, is your father a man of fortune?"

"My father is not living," said she, gravely. "He died two years

ago. He was the pastor of a small church. No, sir; he had nothing but his small salary, except that for some years he taught a few scholars. He taught me." She brightened up again. "I never had any other teacher."

The Doctor folded his hands behind him and gazed abstractedly through the upper sash of the large French windows. The street-door was heard to open.

"There's John," said the convalescent, quickly, and the next moment her husband entered. A tired look vanished from his face as he saw the Doctor. He hurried to grasp his hand, then turned and kissed his wife. The physician took up his hat.

"Doctor," said the wife, holding the hand he gave her, and looking up playfully, with her cheek against the chair-back, "you surely didn't suspect me of being a rich girl, did you?"

"Not at all, madam." His emphasis was so pronounced that the husband laughed.

"There's one comfort in the opposite condition, Doctor," said the young man.

"Yes?"

"Why, yes; you see, it requires no explanation."

"Yes, it does," said the physician; "it is just as binding on people to show good cause why they are poor as it is to show good cause why they're rich. Good-day, madam." The two men went out together. His word would have been good-by, but for the fear of fresh acknowledgments.

CHAPTER V.
HARD QUESTIONS

Dr. Sevier had a simple abhorrence of the expression of personal sentiment in words. Nothing else seemed to him so utterly hollow as the attempt to indicate by speech a regard or affection which was not already demonstrated in behavior. So far did he keep himself aloof from insincerity that he had barely room enough left to be candid.

"I need not see your wife any more," he said, as he went down the stairs with the young husband at his elbow; and the young man had learned him well enough not to oppress him with formal thanks, whatever might have been said or omitted upstairs.

Madame Zénobie contrived to be near enough, as they reached the lower floor, to come in for a share of the meagre adieu. She gave her hand with a dainty grace and a bow that might have been imported from Paris.

Dr. Sevier paused on the front step, half turned toward the open door where the husband still tarried. That was not speech; it was scarcely action; but the young man understood it and was silent. In truth, the Doctor himself felt a pang in this sort of farewell. A physician's way through the world is paved, I have heard one say, with these broken bits of other's lives, of all colors and all degrees of beauty. In his reminiscences, when he can do

no better, he gathers them up, and, turning them over and over in the darkened chamber of his retrospection, sees patterns of delight lit up by the softened rays of bygone time. But even this renews the pain of separation, and Dr. Sevier felt, right here at this door-step, that, if this was to be the last of the Richlings, he would feel the twinge of parting every time they came up again in his memory.

He looked at the house opposite, – where there was really nothing to look at, – and at a woman who happened to be passing, and who was only like a thousand others with whom he had nothing to do.

"Richling," he said, "what brings you to New Orleans, any way?"

Richling leaned his cheek against the door-post.

"Simply seeking my fortune, Doctor."

"Do you think it is here?"

"I'm pretty sure it is; the world owes me a living."

The Doctor looked up.

"When did you get the world in your debt?"

Richling lifted his head pleasantly, and let one foot down a step.

"It owes me a chance to earn a living, doesn't it?"

"I dare say," replied the other; "that's what it generally owes."

"That's all I ask of it," said Richling; "if it will let us alone we'll let it alone."

"You've no right to allow either," said the physician. "No, sir;

no," he insisted, as the young man looked incredulous. There was a pause. "Have you any capital?" asked the Doctor.

"Capital! No," – with a low laugh.

"But surely you have something to" —

"Oh, yes, – a little!"

The Doctor marked the southern "Oh." There is no "O" in Milwaukee.

"You don't find as many vacancies as you expected to see, I suppose – h-m-m?"

There was an under-glow of feeling in the young man's tone as he replied: —

"I was misinformed."

"Well," said the Doctor, staring down-street, "you'll find something. What can you do?"

"Do? Oh, I'm willing to do anything!"

Dr. Sevier turned his gaze slowly, with a shade of disappointment in it. Richling rallied to his defences.

"I think I could make a good book-keeper, or correspondent, or cashier, or any such" —

The Doctor interrupted, with the back of his head toward his listener, looking this time up the street, riverward: —

"Yes; – or a shoe, – or a barrel, – h-m-m?"

Richling bent forward with the frown of defective hearing, and the physician raised his voice: —

"Or a cart-wheel – or a coat?"

"I can make a living," rejoined the other, with a needlessly

resentful-heroic manner, that was lost, or seemed to be, on the physician.

"Richling," – the Doctor suddenly faced around and fixed a kindly severe glance on him, – "why didn't you bring letters?"

"Why," – the young man stopped, looked at his feet, and distinctly blushed. "I think," he stammered – "it seems to me" – he looked up with a faltering eye – "don't you think – I think a man ought to be able to recommend *himself*."

The Doctor's gaze remained so fixed that the self-recommended man could not endure it silently.

"*I* think so," he said, looking down again and swinging his foot. Suddenly he brightened. "Doctor, isn't this your carriage coming?"

"Yes; I told the boy to drive by here when it was mended, and he might find me." The vehicle drew up and stopped. "Still, Richling," the physician continued, as he stepped toward it, "you had better get a letter or two, yet; you might need them."

The door of the carriage clapped to. There seemed a touch of vexation in the sound. Richling, too, closed his door, but in the soft way of one in troubled meditation. Was this a proper farewell? The thought came to both men.

"Stop a minute!" said Dr. Sevier to his driver. He leaned out a little at the side of the carriage and looked back. "Never mind; he has gone in."

The young husband went upstairs slowly and heavily, more slowly and heavily than might be explained by his all-day

unsuccessful tramp after employment. His wife still rested in the rocking-chair. He stood against it, and she took his hand and stroked it.

"Tired?" she asked, looking up at him. He gazed into the languishing fire.

"Yes."

"You're not discouraged, are you?"

"Discouraged? N-no. And yet," he said, slowly shaking his head, "I can't see why I don't find something to do."

"It's because you don't hunt for it," said the wife.

He turned upon her with flashing countenance only to meet her laugh, and to have his head pulled down to her lips. He dropped into the seat left by the physician, laid his head back in his knit hands, and crossed his feet under the chair.

"John, I do *like* Dr. Sevier."

"Why?" The questioner looked at the ceiling.

"Why, don't you like him?" asked the wife, and, as John smiled, she added, "You know you like him."

The husband grasped the poker in both hands, dropped his elbows upon his knees, and began touching the fire, saying slowly: —

"I believe the Doctor thinks I'm a fool."

"That's nothing," said the little wife; "that's only because you married me."

The poker stopped rattling between the grate-bars; the husband looked at the wife. Her eyes, though turned partly away,

betrayed their mischief. There was a deadly pause; then a rush to the assault, a shower of Cupid's arrows, a quick surrender.

But we refrain. Since ever the world began it is Love's real, not his sham, battles that are worth the telling.

CHAPTER VI.
NESTING

A fortnight passed. What with calls on his private skill, and appeals to his public zeal, Dr. Sevier was always loaded like a dromedary. Just now he was much occupied with the affairs of the great American people. For all he was the furthest remove from a mere party contestant or spoilsman, neither his righteous pugnacity nor his human sympathy would allow him to "let politics alone." Often across this preoccupation there flitted a thought of the Richlings.

At length one day he saw them. He had been called by a patient, lodging near Madame Zénobie's house. The proximity of the young couple occurred to him at once, but he instantly realized the extreme poverty of the chance that he should see them. To increase the improbability, the short afternoon was near its close, – an hour when people generally were sitting at dinner.

But what a coquette is that same chance! As he was driving up at the sidewalk's edge before his patient's door, the Richlings came out of theirs, the husband talking with animation, and the wife, all sunshine, skipping up to his side, and taking his arm with both hands, and attending eagerly to his words.

"Heels!" muttered the Doctor to himself, for the sound of Mrs. Richling's gaiters betrayed that fact. Heels were an

innovation still new enough to rouse the resentment of masculine conservatism. But for them she would have pleased his sight entirely. Bonnets, for years microscopic, had again become visible, and her girlish face was prettily set in one whose flowers and ribbon, just joyous and no more, were reflected again in the double-skirted silk *barége*; while the dark mantilla that drooped away from the broad lace collar, shading, without hiding, her "Parodi" waist, seemed made for that very street of heavy-grated archways, iron-railed balconies, and high lattices. The Doctor even accepted patiently the free northern step, which is commonly so repugnant to the southern eye.

A heightened gladness flashed into the faces of the two young people as they descried the physician.

"Good-afternoon," they said, advancing.

"Good-evening," responded the Doctor, and shook hands with each. The meeting was an emphatic pleasure to him. He quite forgot the young man's lack of credentials.

"Out taking the air?" he asked.

"Looking about," said the husband.

"Looking up new quarters," said the wife, knitting her fingers about her husband's elbow and drawing closer to it.

"Were you not comfortable?"

"Yes; but the rooms are larger than we need."

"Ah!" said the Doctor; and there the conversation sank. There was no topic suited to so fleeting a moment, and when they had smiled all round again Dr. Sevier lifted his hat. Ah, yes, there

was one thing.

"Have you found work?" asked the Doctor of Richling.

The wife glanced up for an instant into her husband's face, and then down again.

"No," said Richling, "not yet. If you should hear of anything, Doctor" – He remembered the Doctor's word about letters, stopped suddenly, and seemed as if he might even withdraw the request; but the Doctor said: —

"I will; I will let you know." He gave his hand to Richling. It was on his lips to add: "And should you need," etc.; but there was the wife at the husband's side. So he said no more. The pair bowed their cheerful thanks; but beside the cheer, or behind it, in the husband's face, was there not the look of one who feels the odds against him? And yet, while the two men's hands still held each other, the look vanished, and the young man's light grasp had such firmness in it that, for this cause also, the Doctor withheld his patronizing utterance. He believed he would himself have resented it had he been in Richling's place.

The young pair passed on, and that night, as Dr. Sevier sat at his fireside, an uncompanioned widower, he saw again the young wife look quickly up into her husband's face, and across that face flit and disappear its look of weary dismay, followed by the air of fresh courage with which the young couple had said good-by.

"I wish I had spoken," he thought to himself; "I wish I had made the offer."

And again: —

"I hope he didn't tell her what I said about the letters. Not but I was right, but it'll only wound her."

But Richling had told her; he always "told her everything;" she could not possibly have magnified wifehood more, in her way, than he did in his. May be both ways were faulty; but they were extravagantly, youthfully confident that they were not.

Unknown to Dr. Sevier, the Richlings had returned from their search unsuccessful. Finding prices too much alike in Custom-house street they turned into Burgundy. From Burgundy they passed into Du Maine. As they went, notwithstanding disappointments, their mood grew gay and gayer. Everything that met the eye was quaint and droll to them: men, women, things, places, – all were more or less outlandish. The grotesqueness of the African, and especially the French-tongued African, was to Mrs. Richling particularly irresistible. Multiplying upon each and all of these things was the ludicrousness of the pecuniary strait that brought themselves and these things into contact. Everything turned to fun.

Mrs. Richling's mirthful mood prompted her by and by to begin letting into her inquiries and comments covert double meanings, intended for her husband's private understanding. Thus they crossed Bourbon street.

About there their mirth reached a climax; it was in a small house, a sad, single-story thing, cowering between two high buildings, its eaves, four or five feet deep, overshadowing its one street door and window.

"Looks like a shade for weak eyes," said the wife.

They had debated whether they should enter it or not. He thought no, she thought yes; but he would not insist and she would not insist; she wished him to do as he thought best, and he wished her to do as she thought best, and they had made two or three false starts and retreats before they got inside. But they were in there at length, and busily engaged inquiring into the availability of a small, lace-curtained, front room, when Richling took his wife so completely off her guard by addressing her as "Madam," in the tone and manner of Dr. Sevier, that she laughed in the face of the householder, who had been trying to talk English with a French accent and a hare-lip, and they fled with haste to the sidewalk and around the corner, where they could smile and smile without being villains.

"We must stop this," said the wife, blushing. "We *must* stop it. We're attracting attention."

And this was true at least as to one ragamuffin, who stood on a neighboring corner staring at them. Yet there is no telling to what higher pitch their humor might have carried them if Mrs. Richling had not been weighted down by the constant necessity of correcting her husband's statement of their wants. This she could do, because his exactions were all in the direction of her comfort.

"But, John," she would say each time as they returned to the street and resumed their quest, "those things cost; you can't afford them, can you?"

"Why, you can't be comfortable without them," he would answer.

"But that's not the question, John. We *must* take cheaper lodgings, mustn't we?"

Then John would be silent, and by littles their gayety would rise again.

One landlady was so good-looking, so manifestly and entirely Caucasian, so melodious of voice, and so modest in her account of the rooms she showed, that Mrs. Richling was captivated. The back room on the second floor, overlooking the inner court and numerous low roofs beyond, was suitable and cheap.

"Yes," said the sweet proprietress, turning to Richling, who hung in doubt whether it was quite good enough, "yesseh, I think you be pretty well in that room yeh.[1] Yesseh, I'm shoe you be *verrie* well; yesseh."

"Can we get them at once?"

"Yes? At once? Yes? Oh, yes?"

No downward inflections from her.

"Well," – the wife looked at the husband; he nodded, – "well, we'll take it."

"Yes?" responded the landlady; "well?" leaning against a bedpost and smiling with infantile diffidence, "you dunt want no ref'ence?"

"No," said John, generously, "oh, no; we can trust each other that far, eh?"

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[1] "Yeh" —*ye*, as in *yearn*.

"Oh, yes?" replied the sweet creature; then suddenly changing countenance, as though she remembered something. "But daz de troub' – de room not goin' be vacate for t'ree mont'."

She stretched forth her open palms and smiled, with one arm still around the bedpost.

"Why," exclaimed Mrs. Richling, the very statue of astonishment, "you said just now we could have it at once!"

"Dis room? *Oh*, no; nod *dis* room."

"I don't see how I could have misunderstood you."

The landlady lifted her shoulders, smiled, and clasped her hands across each other under her throat. Then throwing them apart she said brightly: —

"No, I say at Madame La Rose. Me, my room is all fill'. At Madame La Rose, I say, I think you be pritty well. I'm shoe you be verrie well at Madame La Rose. I'm sorry. But you kin paz yondeh – 'tiz juz ad the cawneh? And I am shoe I think you be pritty well at Madame La Rose."

She kept up the repetition, though Mrs. Richling, incensed, had turned her back, and Richling was saying good-day.

"She did say the room was vacant!" exclaimed the little wife, as they reached the sidewalk. But the next moment there came a quick twinkle from her eye, and, waving her husband to go on without her, she said, "You kin paz yondeh; at Madame La Rose I am shoe you be pritty sick." Thereupon she took his arm, – making everybody stare and smile to see a lady and gentleman arm in arm by daylight, – and they went merrily on their way.

The last place they stopped at was in Royal street. The entrance was bad. It was narrow even for those two. The walls were stained by dampness, and the smell of a totally undrained soil came up through the floor. The stairs ascended a few steps, came too near a low ceiling, and shot forward into cavernous gloom to find a second rising place farther on. But the rooms, when reached, were a tolerably pleasant disappointment, and the proprietress a person of reassuring amiability.

She bestirred herself in an obliging way that was the most charming thing yet encountered. She gratified the young people every moment afresh with her readiness to understand or guess their English queries and remarks, hung her head archly when she had to explain away little objections, delivered her No sirs with gravity and her Yes sirs with bright eagerness, shook her head slowly with each negative announcement, and accompanied her affirmations with a gracious bow and a smile full of rice powder.

She rendered everything so agreeable, indeed, that it almost seemed impolite to inquire narrowly into matters, and when the question of price had to come up it was really difficult to bring it forward, and Richling quite lost sight of the economic rules to which he had silently acceded in the *Rue Du Maine*.

"And you will carpet the floor?" he asked, hovering off of the main issue.

"Put coppit? Ah! cettainlee!" she replied, with a lovely bow and a wave of the hand toward Mrs. Richling, whom she had already given the same assurance.

"Yes," responded the little wife, with a captivated smile, and nodded to her husband.

"We want to get the decentest thing that is cheap," he said, as the three stood close together in the middle of the room.

The landlady flushed.

"No, no, John," said the wife, quickly, "don't you know what we said?" Then, turning to the proprietress, she hurried to add, "We want the cheapest thing that is decent."

But the landlady had not waited for the correction.

"*Dis*sent! You want somesin *dis*sent!" She moved a step backward on the floor, scoured and smeared with brick-dust, her ire rising visibly at every heart-throb, and pointing her outward-turned open hand energetically downward, added: —

"'Tis yeh!" She breathed hard. "*Mais*, no; you don't *want* somesin dissent. No!" She leaned forward interrogatively: "You want somesin tchip?" She threw both elbows to the one side, cast her spread hands off in the same direction, drew the cheek on that side down into the collar-bone, raised her eyebrows, and pushed her upper lip with her lower, scornfully.

At that moment her ear caught the words of the wife's apologetic amendment. They gave her fresh wrath and new opportunity. For her new foe was a woman, and a woman trying to speak in defence of the husband against whose arm she clung.

"Ah-h-h!" Her chin went up; her eyes shot lightning; she folded her arms fiercely, and drew herself to her best height; and, as Richling's eyes shot back in rising indignation, cried: —

"Ziss pless? 'Tis not ze pless! Zis pless – is diss'nt pless! I am diss'nt woman, me! Fo w'at you come in yeh?"

"My dear madam! My husband" —

"Dass you' uzban'?" pointing at him.

"Yes!" cried the two Richlings at once.

The woman folded her arms again, turned half-aside, and, lifting her eyes to the ceiling, simply remarked, with an ecstatic smile: —

"Humph!" and left the pair, red with exasperation, to find the street again through the darkening cave of the stair-way.

It was still early the next morning, when Richling entered his wife's apartment with an air of brisk occupation. She was pinning her brooch at the bureau glass.

"Mary," he exclaimed, "put something on and come see what I've found! The queerest, most romantic old thing in the city; the most comfortable – and the cheapest! Here, is this the wardrobe key? To save time I'll get your bonnet."

"No, no, no!" cried the laughing wife, confronting him with sparkling eyes, and throwing herself before the wardrobe; "I can't let you touch my bonnet!"

There is a limit, it seems, even to a wife's subserviency.

However, in a very short time afterward, by the feminine measure, they were out in the street, and people were again smiling at the pretty pair to see her arm in his, and she actually *keeping step*. 'Twas very funny.

As they went John described his discovery: A pair of huge,

solid green gates immediately on the sidewalk, in the dull façade of a tall, red brick building with old carved vinework on its window and door frames. Hinges a yard long on the gates; over the gates a semi-circular grating of iron bars an inch in diameter; in one of these gates a wicket, and on the wicket a heavy, battered, highly burnished brass knocker. A short-legged, big-bodied, and very black slave to usher one through the wicket into a large, wide, paved corridor, where from the middle joist overhead hung a great iron lantern. Big double doors at the far end, standing open, flanked with diamond-paned side-lights of colored glass, and with an arch at the same, fan-shaped, above. Beyond these doors and showing through them, a flagged court, bordered all around by a narrow, raised parterre under pomegranate and fruit-laden orange, and over-towered by vine-covered and latticed walls, from whose ragged eaves vagabond weeds laughed down upon the flowers of the parterre below, robbed of late and early suns. Stairs old fashioned, broad; rooms, their choice of two; one looking down into the court, the other into the street; furniture faded, capacious; ceilings high; windows, each opening upon its own separate small balcony, where, instead of balustrades, was graceful iron scroll-work, centered by some long-dead owner's monogram two feet in length; and on the balcony next the division wall, close to another on the adjoining property, a quarter circle of iron-work set like a blind-bridle, and armed with hideous prongs for house-breakers to get impaled on.

"Why, in there," said Richling, softly, as they hurried in, "we'll be hid from the whole world, and the whole world from us."

The wife's answer was only the upward glance of her blue eyes into his, and a faint smile.

The place was all it had been described to be, and more, – except in one particular.

"And my husband tells me" – The owner of said husband stood beside him, one foot a little in advance of the other, her folded parasol hanging down the front of her skirt from her gloved hands, her eyes just returning to the landlady's from an excursion around the ceiling, and her whole appearance as fresh as the pink flowers that nestled between her brow and the rim of its precious covering. She smiled as she began her speech, but not enough to spoil what she honestly believed to be a very business-like air and manner. John had quietly dropped out of the negotiations, and she felt herself put upon her mettle as his agent. "And my husband tells me the price of this front room is ten dollars a month."

"Munse?"

The respondent was a very white, corpulent woman, who constantly panted for breath, and was everywhere sinking down into chairs, with her limp, unfortified skirt dropping between her knees, and her hands pressed on them exhaustedly.

"Munse?" She turned from husband to wife, and back again, a glance of alarmed inquiry.

Mary tried her hand at French.

"Yes; *oui, madame*. Ten dollah the month —*le mois*."

Intelligence suddenly returned. Madame made a beautiful, silent O with her mouth and two others with her eyes.

"Ah *non*! By munse? No, madame. Ah-h! impossybl'! By *wick*, yes; ten dollah de wick! Ah!"

She touched her bosom with the wide-spread fingers of one hand and threw them toward her hearers.

The room-hunters got away, yet not so quickly but they heard behind and above them her scornful laugh, addressed to the walls of the empty room.

A day or two later they secured an apartment, cheap, and – morally – decent; but otherwise – ah!

CHAPTER VII.
DISAPPEARANCE

It was the year of a presidential campaign. The party that afterward rose to overwhelming power was, for the first time, able to put its candidate fairly abreast of his competitors. The South was all afire. Rising up or sitting down, coming or going, week-day or Sabbath-day, eating or drinking, marrying or burying, the talk was all of slavery, abolition, and a disrupted country.

Dr. Sevier became totally absorbed in the issue. He was too unconventional a thinker ever to find himself in harmony with all the declarations of any party, and yet it was a necessity of his nature to be in the *mêlée*. He had his own array of facts, his own peculiar deductions; his own special charges of iniquity against this party and of criminal forbearance against that; his own startling political economy; his own theory of rights; his own interpretations of the Constitution; his own threats and warnings; his own exhortations, and his own prophecies, of which one cannot say all have come true. But he poured them forth from the mighty heart of one who loved his country, and sat down with a sense of duty fulfilled and wiped his pale forehead while the band played a polka.

It hardly need be added that he proposed to dispense with

politicians, or that, when "the boys" presently counted him into their party team for campaign haranguing, he let them clap the harness upon him and splashed along in the mud with an intention as pure as snow.

"Hurrah for" —

Whom it is no matter now. It was not Fremont. Buchanan won the race. Out went the lights, down came the platforms, rockets ceased to burst; it was of no use longer to "Wait for the wagon"; "Old Dan Tucker" got "out of the way," small boys were no longer fellow-citizens, dissolution was postponed, and men began to have an eye single to the getting of money.

A mercantile friend of Dr. Sevier had a vacant clerkship which it was necessary to fill. A bright recollection flashed across the Doctor's memory.

"Narcisse!"

"Yesseh!"

"Go to Number 4 °Custom-house street and inquire for Mr. Fledgeling; or, if he isn't in, for Mrs. Fledge – humph! Richling, I mean; I" —

Narcisse laughed aloud.

"Ha-ha-ha! daz de way, sometime'! My hant she got a honcl' – he says, once 'pon a time" —

"Never mind! Go at once!"

"All a-ight, seh!"

"Give him this card" —

"Yesseh!"

"These people" —

"Yesseh!"

"Well, wait till you get your errand, can't you? These" —

"Yesseh!"

"These people want to see him."

"All a-ight, seh!"

Narcisse threw open and jerked off a worsted jacket, took his coat down from a peg, transferred a snowy handkerchief from the breast-pocket of the jacket to that of the coat, felt in his pantaloons to be sure that he had his match-case and cigarettes, changed his shoes, got his hat from a high nail by a little leap, and put it on a head as handsome as Apollo's.

"Doctah Seveeah," he said, "in fact, I fine that a ve'y gen'lemany young man, that Mistoo Itchlin, weely, Doctah."

The Doctor murmured to himself from the letter he was writing.

"Well, *au 'evoi'*, Doctah; I'm goin'."

Out in the corridor he turned and jerked his chin up and curled his lip, brought a match and cigarette together in the lee of his hollowed hand, took one first, fond draw, and went down the stairs as if they were on fire.

At Canal street he fell in with two noble fellows of his own circle, and the three went around by way of Exchange alley to get a glass of soda at McCloskey's old down-town stand. His two friends were out of employment at the moment, – making him, consequently, the interesting figure in the trio as he inveighed

against his master.

"Ah, phooh!" he said, indicating the end of his speech by dropping the stump of his cigarette into the sand on the floor and softly spitting upon it, – "*le* Shylock *de la rue* Carondelet!" – and then in English, not to lose the admiration of the Irish waiter: —

"He don't want to haugment me! I din hass 'im, because the 'lection. But you juz wait till dat firce of Jannawerry!"

The waiter swathed the zinc counter, and inquired why Narcisse did not make his demands at the present moment.

"W'y I don't hass 'im now? Because w'en I hass 'im he know' he's got to *do* it! You thing I'm goin' to kill myseff workin'?"

Nobody said yes, and by and by he found himself alive in the house of Madame Zénobie. The furniture was being sold at auction, and the house was crowded with all sorts and colors of men and women. A huge sideboard was up for sale as he entered, and the crier was crying: —

"Faw-ty-fi' dollah! faw-ty-fi' dollah, ladies an' gentymen! On'y faw-ty-fi' dollah fo' thad magniffyzan sidebode! *Quarante-cinque piastres, seulement, messieurs! Les* knobs *vaut bien cette prix*! Gentymen, de knobs is worse de money! Ladies, if you don' stop dat talkin', I will not sell one thing mo'! *Et quarante cinque piastres*– faw-ty-fi' dollah" —

"Fifty!" cried Narcisse, who had not owned that much at one time since his father was a constable; realizing which fact, he slipped away upstairs and found Madame Zénobie half crazed at the slaughter of her assets.

She sat in a chair against the wall of the room the Richlings had occupied, a spectacle of agitated dejection. Here and there about the apartment, either motionless in chairs, or moving noiselessly about, and pulling and pushing softly this piece of furniture and that, were numerous vulture-like persons of either sex, waiting the up-coming of the auctioneer. Narcisse approached her briskly.

"Well, Madame Zénobie!" – he spoke in French – "is it you who lives here? Don't you remember me? What! No? You don't remember how I used to steal figs from you?"

The vultures slowly turned their heads. Madame Zénobie looked at him in a dazed way.

No, she did not remember. So many had robbed her – all her life.

"But you don't look at me, Madame Zénobie. Don't you remember, for example, once pulling a little boy – as little as *that*– out of your fig-tree, and taking the half of a shingle, split lengthwise, in your hand, and his head under your arm, – swearing you would do it if you died for it, – and bending him across your knee," – he began a vigorous but graceful movement of the right arm, which few members of our fallen race could fail to recognize, – "and you don't remember me, my old friend?"

She looked up into the handsome face with a faint smile of affirmation. He laughed with delight.

"The shingle was *that* wide. Ah! Madame Zénobie, you did it well!" He softly smote the memorable spot, first with one hand

and then with the other, shrinking forward spasmodically with each contact, and throwing utter woe into his countenance. The general company smiled. He suddenly put on great seriousness.

"Madame Zénobie, I hope your furniture is selling well?" He still spoke in French.

She cast her eyes upward pleadingly, caught her breath, threw the back of her hand against her temple, and dashed it again to her lap, shaking her head.

Narcisse was sorry.

"I have been doing what I could for you, downstairs, – running up the prices of things. I wish I could stay to do more, for the sake of old times. I came to see Mr. Richling, Madame Zénobie; is he in? Dr. Sevier wants him."

Richling? Why, the Richlings did not live there! The Doctor must know it. Why should she be made responsible for this mistake? It was his oversight. They had moved long ago. Dr. Sevier had seen them looking for apartments. Where did they live now? Ah, me! *she* could not tell. Did Mr. Richling owe the Doctor something?

"Owe? Certainly not. The Doctor – on the contrary" —

Ah! well, indeed, she didn't know where they lived, it is true; but the fact was, Mr. Richling happened to be there just then! —*à-ç't'eure*! He had come to get a few trifles left by his madame.

Narcisse made instant search. Richling was not on the upper floor. He stepped to the landing and looked down. There he went!

"Mistoo 'Itchlin!"

Richling failed to hear. Sharper ears might have served him better. He passed out by the street door. Narcisse stopped the auction by the noise he made coming downstairs after him. He had some trouble with the front door, – lost time there, but got out.

Richling was turning a corner. Narcisse ran there and looked; looked up – looked down – looked into every store and shop on either side of the way clear back to Canal street; crossed it, went back to the Doctor's office, and reported. If he omitted such details as having seen and then lost sight of the man he sought, it may have been in part from the Doctor's indisposition to give him speaking license. The conclusion was simple: the Richlings could not be found.

The months of winter passed. No sign of them.

"They've gone back home," the Doctor often said to himself. How much better that was than to stay where they had made a mistake in venturing, and become the nurslings of patronizing strangers! He gave his admiration free play, now that they were quite gone. True courage that Richling had – courage to retreat when retreat is best! And his wife – ah! what a reminder of – hush, memory!

"Yes, they must have gone home!" The Doctor spoke very positively, because, after all, he was haunted by doubt.

One spring morning he uttered a soft exclamation as he glanced at his office-slate. The first notice on it read: —

Please call as soon as you can at number 292 St. Mary street, corner of Prytania. Lower corner – opposite the asylum.

John Richling.

The place was far up in the newer part of the American quarter. The signature had the appearance as if the writer had begun to write some other name, and had changed it to Richling.

CHAPTER VIII.
A QUESTION OF BOOK-KEEPING

A day or two after Narcisse had gone looking for Richling at the house of Madame Zénobie, he might have found him, had he known where to search, in Tchoupitoulas street.

Whoever remembers that thoroughfare as it was in those days, when the commodious "cotton-float" had not quite yet come into use, and Poydras and other streets did not so vie with Tchoupitoulas in importance as they do now, will recall a scene of commercial hurly-burly that inspired much pardonable vanity in the breast of the utilitarian citizen. Drays, drays, drays! Not the light New York things; but big, heavy, solid affairs, many of them drawn by two tall mules harnessed tandem. Drays by threes and by dozens, drays in opposing phalanxes, drays in long processions, drays with all imaginable kinds of burden; cotton in bales, piled as high as the omnibuses; leaf tobacco in huge hogsheads; cases of linens and silks; stacks of raw-hides; crates of cabbages; bales of prints and of hay; interlocked heaps of blue and red ploughs; bags of coffee, and spices, and corn; bales of bagging; barrels, casks, and tierces; whisky, pork, onions, oats, bacon, garlic, molasses, and other delicacies; rice, sugar, – what was there not? Wines of France and Spain in pipes, in baskets, in hampers, in octaves; queensware from England; cheeses, like

cart-wheels, from Switzerland; almonds, lemons, raisins, olives, boxes of citron, casks of chains; specie from Vera Cruz; cries of drivers, cracking of whips, rumble of wheels, tremble of earth, frequent gorge and stoppage. It seemed an idle tale to say that any one could be lacking bread and raiment. "We are a great city," said the patient foot-passengers, waiting long on street corners for opportunity to cross the way.

On one of these corners paused Richling. He had not found employment, but you could not read that in his face; as well as he knew himself, he had come forward into the world prepared amiably and patiently to be, to do, to suffer anything, provided it was not wrong or ignominious. He did not see that even this is not enough in this rough world; nothing had yet taught him that one must often gently suffer rudeness and wrong. As to what constitutes ignominy he had a very young man's – and, shall we add? a very American – idea. He could not have believed, had he been told, how many establishments he had passed by, omitting to apply in them for employment. He little dreamed he had been too select. He had entered not into any house of the Samaritans, to use a figure; much less, to speak literally, had he gone to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Mary, hiding away in uncomfortable quarters a short stone's throw from Madame Zénobie's, little imagined that, in her broad irony about his not hunting for employment, there was really a tiny seed of truth. She felt sure that two or three persons who had seemed about to employ him had failed to do so because they detected the defect

in his hearing, and in one or two cases she was right.

Other persons paused on the same corner where Richling stood, under the same momentary embarrassment. One man, especially busy-looking, drew very near him. And then and there occurred this simple accident, – that at last he came in contact with the man who had work to give him. This person good-humoredly offered an impatient comment on their enforced delay. Richling answered in sympathetic spirit, and the first speaker responded with a question: —

"Stranger in the city?"

"Yes."

"Buying goods for up-country?"

It was a pleasant feature of New Orleans life that sociability to strangers on the street was not the exclusive prerogative of gamblers' decoys.

"No; I'm looking for employment."

"Aha!" said the man, and moved away a little. But in a moment Richling, becoming aware that his questioner was glancing all over him with critical scrutiny, turned, and the man spoke.

"D'you keep books?"

Just then a way opened among the vehicles; and the man, young and muscular, darted into it, and Richling followed.

"I *can* keep books," he said, as they reached the farther curb-stone.

The man seized him by the arm.

"D'you see that pile of codfish and herring where that tall

man is at work yonder with a marking-pot and brush? Well, just beyond there is a boarding-house, and then a hardware store; you can hear them throwing down sheets of iron. Here; you can see the sign. See? Well, the next is my store. Go in there – upstairs into the office – and wait till I come."

Richling bowed and went. In the office he sat down and waited what seemed a very long time. Could he have misunderstood? For the man did not come. There was a person sitting at a desk on the farther side of the office, writing, who had not lifted his head from first to last, Richling said: —

"Can you tell me when the proprietor will be in?"

The writer's eyes rose, and dropped again upon his writing.

"What do you want with him?"

"He asked me to wait here for him."

"Better wait, then."

Just then in came the merchant. Richling rose, and he uttered a rude exclamation: —

"*I* forgot you completely! Where did you say you kept books at, last?"

"I've not kept anybody's books yet, but I can do it."

The merchant's response was cold and prompt. He did not look at Richling, but took a sample vial of molasses from a dirty mantel-piece and lifted it between his eyes and the light, saying: —

"You can't do any such thing. I don't want you."

"Sir," said Richling, so sharply that the merchant looked

round, “if you don’t want me I don’t want you; but you mustn’t attempt to tell me that what I say is not true!” He had stepped forward as he began to speak, but he stopped before half his words were uttered, and saw his folly. Even while his voice still trembled with passion and his head was up, he colored with mortification. That feeling grew no less when his offender simply looked at him, and the man at the desk did not raise his eyes. It rather increased when he noticed that both of them were young – as young as he.

“I don’t doubt your truthfulness,” said the merchant, marking the effect of his forbearance; “but you ought to know you can’t come in and take charge of a large set of books in the midst of a busy season, when you’ve never kept books before.”

“I don’t know it at all.”

“Well, I do,” said the merchant, still more coldly than before. “There are my books,” he added, warming, and pointed to three great canvassed and black-initialled volumes standing in a low iron safe, “left only yesterday in such a snarl, by a fellow who had ‘never kept books, but knew how,’ that I shall have to open another set! After this I shall have a book-keeper who has kept books.”

He turned away.

Some weeks afterward Richling recalled vividly a thought that had struck him only faintly at this time: that, beneath much superficial severity and energy, there was in this establishment a certain looseness of management. It may have been this half-

recognized thought that gave him courage, now, to say, advancing another step: —

"One word, if you please."

"It's no use, my friend."

"It may be."

"How?"

"Get an experienced book-keeper for your new set of books" —

"You can bet your bottom dollar!" said the merchant, turning again and running his hands down into his lower pockets. "And even he'll have as much as he can do" —

"That is just what I wanted you to say," interrupted Richling, trying hard to smile; "then you can let me straighten up the old set."

"Give a new hand the work of an expert!"

The merchant almost laughed out. He shook his head and was about to say more, when Richling persisted: —

"If I don't do the work to your satisfaction don't pay me a cent."

"I never make that sort of an arrangement; no, sir!"

Unfortunately it had not been Richling's habit to show this pertinacity, else life might have been easier to him as a problem; but these two young men, his equals in age, were casting amused doubts upon his ability to make good his professions. The case was peculiar. He reached a hand out toward the books.

"Let me look over them for one day; if I don't convince you

the next morning in five minutes that I can straighten them I'll leave them without a word."

The merchant looked down an instant, and then turned to the man at the desk.

"What do you think of that, Sam?"

Sam set his elbows upon the desk, took the small end of his pen-holder in his hands and teeth, and, looking up, said: —

"I don't know; you might – try him."

"What did you say your name was?" asked the other, again facing Richling. "Ah, yes! Who are your references, Mr. Richmond?"

"Sir?" Richling leaned slightly forward and turned his ear.

"I say, who knows you?"

"Nobody."

"Nobody! Where are you from?"

"Milwaukee."

The merchant tossed out his arm impatiently.

"Oh, I can't do that kind o' business."

He turned abruptly, went to his desk, and, sitting down half-hidden by it, took up an open letter.

"I bought that coffee, Sam," he said, rising again and moving farther away.

"Um-hum," said Sam; and all was still.

Richling stood expecting every instant to turn on the next and go. Yet he went not. Under the dusty front windows of the counting-room the street was roaring below. Just beyond a glass

partition at his back a great windlass far up under the roof was rumbling with the descent of goods from a hatchway at the end of its tense rope. Salesmen were calling, trucks were trundling, shipping clerks and porters were replying. One brawny fellow he saw, through the glass, take a herring from a broken box, and stop to feed it to a sleek, brindled mouser. Even the cat was valued; but he – he stood there absolutely zero. He saw it. He saw it as he never had seen it before in his life. This truth smote him like a javelin: that all this world wants is a man's permission to do without him. Right then it was that he thought he swallowed all his pride; whereas he only tasted its bitter brine as like a wave it took him up and lifted him forward bodily. He strode up to the desk beyond which stood the merchant, with the letter still in his hand, and said: —

"I've not gone yet! I may have to be turned off by you, but not in this manner!"

The merchant looked around at him with a smile of surprise, mixed with amusement and commendation, but said nothing. Richling held out his open hand.

"I don't ask you to trust me. Don't trust me. Try me!"

He looked distressed. He was not begging, but he seemed to feel as though he were.

The merchant dropped his eyes again upon the letter, and in that attitude asked: —

"What do you say, Sam?"

"He can't hurt anything," said Sam.

The merchant looked suddenly at Richling.

"You're not from Milwaukee. You're a Southern man."

Richling changed color.

"I said Milwaukee."

"Well," said the merchant, "I hardly know. Come and see me further about it to-morrow morning. I haven't time to talk now."

"Take a seat," he said, the next morning, and drew up a chair sociably before the returned applicant. "Now, suppose I was to give you those books, all in confusion as they are, what would you do first of all?"

Mary fortunately had asked the same question the night before, and her husband was entirely ready with an answer which they had studied out in bed.

"I should send your deposit-book to bank to be balanced, and, without waiting for it, I should begin to take a trial-balance off the books. If I didn't get one pretty soon, I'd drop that for the time being, and turn in and render the accounts of everybody on the books, asking them to examine and report."

"All right," said the merchant, carelessly; "we'll try you."

"Sir?" Richling bent his ear.

"*All right; we'll try you!* I don't care much about recommendations. I generally most always make up my opinion about a man from looking at him. I'm that sort of a man."

He smiled with inordinate complacency.

So, week by week, as has been said already, the winter passed, – Richling on one side of the town, hidden away in his

work, and Dr. Sevier on the other, very positive that the "young pair" must have returned to Milwaukee.

At length the big books were readjusted in all their hundreds of pages, were balanced, and closed. Much satisfaction was expressed; but another man had meantime taken charge of the new books, – one who influenced business, and Richling had nothing to do but put on his hat.

However, the house cheerfully recommended him to a neighboring firm, which also had disordered books to be righted; and so more weeks passed. Happy weeks! Happy days! Ah, the joy of them! John bringing home money, and Mary saving it!

"But, John, it seems such a pity not to have stayed with A, B, & Co.; doesn't it?"

"I don't think so. I don't think they'll last much longer."

And when he brought word that A, B, & Co. had gone into a thousand pieces Mary was convinced that she had a very far-seeing husband.

By and by, at Richling's earnest and restless desire, they moved their lodgings again. And thus we return by a circuit to the morning when Dr. Sevier, taking up his slate, read the summons that bade him call at the corner of St. Mary and Prytania streets.

CHAPTER IX.
WHEN THE WIND BLOWS

The house stands there to-day. A small, pinched, frame, ground-floor-and-attic, double tenement, with its roof sloping toward St. Mary street and overhanging its two door-steps that jut out on the sidewalk. There the Doctor's carriage stopped, and in its front room he found Mary in bed again, as ill as ever. A humble German woman, living in the adjoining half of the house, was attending to the invalid's wants, and had kept her daughter from the public school to send her to the apothecary with the Doctor's prescription.

"It is the poor who help the poor," thought the physician.

"Is this your home?" he asked the woman softly, as he sat down by the patient's pillow. He looked about upon the small, cheaply furnished room, full of the neat makeshifts of cramped housewifery.

"It's mine," whispered Mary. Even as she lay there in peril of her life, and flattened out as though Juggernaut had rolled over her, her eyes shone with happiness and scintillated as the Doctor exclaimed in undertone: —

"Yours!" He laid his hand upon her forehead. "Where is Mr. Richling?"

"At the office." Her eyes danced with delight. She would have

begun, then and there, to tell him all that had happened, – "had taken care of herself all along," she said, "until they began to move. In moving, had been *obliged* to overwork – hardly *fixed* yet" —

But the Doctor gently checked her and bade her be quiet.

"I will," was the faint reply; "I will; but – just one thing, Doctor, please let me say."

"Well?"

"John" —

"Yes, yes; I know; he'd be here, only you wouldn't let him stay away from his work."

She smiled assent, and he smiled in return.

"'Business is business,'" he said.

She turned a quick, sparkling glance of affirmation, as if she had lately had some trouble to maintain that ancient truism. She was going to speak again, but the Doctor waved his hand downward soothingly toward the restless form and uplifted eyes.

"All right," she whispered, and closed them.

The next day she was worse. The physician found himself, to use his words, "only the tardy attendant of offended nature." When he dropped his finger-ends gently upon her temple she tremblingly grasped his hand.

"You'll save me?" she whispered.

"Yes," he replied; "we'll do that – the Lord helping us."

A glad light shone from her face as he uttered the latter clause. Whereat he made haste to add: —

"I don't pray, but I'm sure you do."

She silently pressed the hand she still held.

On Sunday he found Richling at the bedside. Mary had improved considerably in two or three days. She lay quite still as they talked, only shifting her glance softly from one to the other as one and then the other spoke. The Doctor heard with interest Richling's full account of all that had occurred since he had met them last together. Mary's eyes filled with merriment when John told the droller part of their experiences in the hard quarters from which they had only lately removed. But the Doctor did not so much as smile. Richling finished, and the physician was silent.

"Oh, we're getting along," said Richling, stroking the small, weak hand that lay near him on the coverlet. But still the Doctor kept silence.

"Of course," said Richling, very quietly, looking at his wife, "we mustn't be surprised at a backset now and then. But we're getting on."

Mary turned her eyes toward the Doctor. Was he not going to assent at all? She seemed about to speak. He bent his ear, and she said, with a quiet smile: —

"'When the wind blows, the cradle will rock.'"

The physician gave only a heavy-eyed "Humph!" and a faint look of amusement.

"What did she say?" said Richling; the words had escaped his ear. The Doctor repeated it, and Richling, too, smiled.

Yet it was a good speech, – why not? But the patient also

smiled, and turned her eyes toward the wall with a disconcerted look, as if the smile might end in tears. For herein lay the very difficulty that always brought the Doctor's carriage to the door, – the cradle would not rock.

For a few days more that carriage continued to appear, and then ceased. Richling dropped in one morning at Number 3½ Carondelet, and settled his bill with Narcisse.

The young Creole was much pleased to be at length brought into actual contact with a man of his own years, who, without visible effort, had made an impression on Dr. Sevier.

Until the money had been paid and the bill receipted nothing more than a formal business phrase or two passed between them. But as Narcisse delivered the receipted bill, with an elaborate gesture of courtesy, and Richling began to fold it for his pocket, the Creole remarked: —

"I 'ope you will excuse the 'an'-a-'iting."

Richling reopened the paper; the penmanship was beautiful.

"Do you ever write better than this?" he asked. "Why, I wish I could write half as well!"

"No; I do not fine that well a-'itten. I cannot see 'ow that is, – I nevva 'ite to the satizfagtion of my abil'ty soon in the mawnin's. I am dest'oying my chi'og'aphy at that desk yeh."

"Indeed?" said Richling; "why, I should think" —

"Yesseh, 'tis the tooth. But consunning the chi'og'aphy, Mistoo Itchlin, I 'ave descovvud one thing to a maul cettainty, and that is, if I 'ave something to 'ite to a young lady, I always dizguise

my chi'og'aphy. Ha-ah! I 'ave learn that! You will be aztonizh' to see in 'ow many diffe'n' fawm' I can make my 'an'-a-'iting to appeah. That paz thoo my fam'ly, in fact, Mistoo Itchlin. My hant, she's got a honcle w'at use' to be cluck in a bank, w'at could make the si'natu'e of the pwesiden', as well as of the cashieh, with that so absolute puffegtion, that they tu'n 'im out of the bank! Yesseh. In fact, I thing you ought to know 'ow to 'ite a ve'y fine 'an', Mistoo Itchlin."

"N-not very," said Richling; "my hand is large and legible, but not well adapted for – book-keeping; it's too heavy."

"You 'ave the 'ight physio'nomie, I am shu'. You will pe'haps believe me with difficulty, Mistoo Itchlin, but I assu' you I can tell if a man 'as a fine chi'og'aphy aw no, by juz lookin' upon his liniment. Do you know that Benjamin Fwanklin 'ote a v'ey fine chi'og'aphy, in fact? Also, Voltaire. Yesseh. An' Napoleon Bonaparte. Lawd By'on muz 'ave 'ad a beaucheouz chi'og'aphy. 'Tis impossible not to be, with that face. He is my favo'ite poet, that Lawd By'on. Moze people pwefeh 'im to Shakspere, in fact. Well, you muz go? I am ve'y 'appy to meck yo' acquaintanze, Mistoo Itchlin, seh. I am so'y Doctah Seveeah is not theh pwesently. The negs time you call, Mistoo Itchlin, you muz not be too much aztonizh to fine me gone from yeh. Yesseh. He's got to haugment me ad the en' of that month, an' we 'ave to-day the fifteenth Mawch. Do you smoke, Mistoo Itchlin?" He extended a package of cigarettes. Richling accepted one. "I smoke lawgely in that weatheh," striking a match on his thigh. "I

feel ve'y sultwy to-day. Well," – he seized the visitor's hand, – "*au' evoi'*, Mistoo Itchlin." And Narcisse returned to his desk happy in the conviction that Richling had gone away dazzled.

CHAPTER X.
GENTLES AND COMMONS

Dr. Sevier sat in the great easy-chair under the drop-light of his library table trying to read a book. But his thought was not on the page. He expired a long breath of annoyance, and lifted his glance backward from the bottom of the page to its top.

Why must his mind keep going back to that little cottage in St. Mary street? What good reason was there? Would they thank him for his solicitude? Indeed! He almost smiled his contempt of the supposition. Why, when on one or two occasions he had betrayed a least little bit of kindly interest, – what? Up had gone their youthful vivacity like an umbrella. Oh, yes! – like all young folks —*their* affairs were intensely private. Once or twice he had shaken his head at the scantiness of all their provisions for life. Well? They simply and unconsciously stole a hold upon one another's hand or arm, as much as to say, "To love is enough." When, gentlemen of the jury, it isn't enough!

"Pshaw!" The word escaped him audibly. He drew partly up from his half recline, and turned back a leaf of the book to try once more to make out the sense of it.

But there was Mary, and there was her husband. Especially Mary. Her image came distinctly between his eyes and the page. There she was, just as on his last visit, – a superfluous one – no

charge, – sitting and plying her needle, unaware of his approach, gently moving her rocking-chair, and softly singing, "Flow on, thou shining river," – the song his own wife used to sing. "O child, child! do you think it's always going to be 'shining'?" They shouldn't be so contented. Was pride under that cloak? Oh, no, no! But even if the content was genuine, it wasn't good. Why, they oughtn't to be *able* to be happy so completely out of their true sphere. It showed insensibility. But, there again, – Richling wasn't insensible, much less Mary.

The Doctor let his book sink, face downward, upon his knee.

"They're too big to be playing in the sand." He took up the book again. "'Tisn't my business to tell them so." But before he got the volume fairly before his eyes his professional bell rang, and he tossed the book upon the table.

"Well, why don't you bring him in?" he asked, in a tone of reproof, of a servant who presented a card; and in a moment the visitor entered.

He was a person of some fifty years of age, with a patrician face, in which it was impossible to tell where benevolence ended and pride began. His dress was of fine cloth, a little antique in cut, and fitting rather loosely on a form something above the medium height, of good width, but bent in the shoulders, and with arms that had been stronger. Years, it might be, or possibly some unflinching struggle with troublesome facts, had given many lines of his face a downward slant. He apologized for the hour of his call, and accepted with thanks the chair offered

him.

"You are not a resident of the city?" asked Dr. Sevier.

"I am from Kentucky." The voice was rich, and the stranger's general air one of rather conscious social eminence.

"Yes?" said the Doctor, not specially pleased, and looked at him closer. He wore a black satin neck-stock, and dark-blue buttoned gaiters. His hair was dyed brown. A slender frill adorned his shirt-front.

"Mrs." – the visitor began to say, not giving the name, but waving his index-finger toward his card, which Dr. Sevier had laid upon the table, just under the lamp, – "my wife, Doctor, seems to be in a very feeble condition. Her physicians have advised her to try the effects of a change of scene, and I have brought her down to your busy city, sir."

The Doctor assented. The stranger resumed: —

"Its hurry and energy are a great contrast to the plantation life, sir."

"They're very unlike," the physician admitted.

"This chafing of thousands of competitive designs," said the visitor, "this great fretwork of cross purposes, is a decided change from the quiet order of our rural life. Hmm! There everything is under the administration of one undisputed will, and is executed by the unquestioning obedience of our happy and contented slave peasantry. I prefer the country. But I thought this was just the change that would arouse and electrify an invalid who has really no tangible complaint."

"Has the result been unsatisfactory?"

"Entirely so. I am unexpectedly disappointed." The speaker's thought seemed to be that the climate of New Orleans had not responded with that hospitable alacrity which was due so opulent, reasonable, and universally obeyed a guest.

There was a pause here, and Dr. Sevier looked around at the book which lay at his elbow. But the visitor did not resume, and the Doctor presently asked: —

"Do you wish me to see your wife?"

"I called to see you alone first," said the other, "because there might be questions to be asked which were better answered in her absence."

"Then you think you know the secret of her illness, do you?"

"I do. I think, indeed I may say I know, it is – bereavement."

The Doctor compressed his lips and bowed.

The stranger drooped his head somewhat, and, resting his elbows on the arms of his chair, laid the tips of his thumbs and fingers softly together.

"The truth is, sir, she cannot recover from the loss of our son."

"An infant?" asked the Doctor. His bell rang again as he put the question.

"No, sir; a young man, – one whom I had thought a person of great promise; just about to enter life."

"When did he die?"

"He has been dead nearly a year. I" – The speaker ceased as the mulatto waiting-man appeared at the open door, with a large,

simple, German face looking easily over his head from behind.

"Toctor," said the owner of this face, lifting an immense open hand, "Toctor, uf you bleace, Toctor, you vill bleace ugscooce me."

The Doctor frowned at the servant for permitting the interruption. But the gentleman beside him said: —

"Let him come in, sir; he seems to be in haste, sir, and I am not, – I am not, at all."

"Come in," said the physician.

The new-comer stepped into the room. He was about six feet three inches in height, three feet six in breadth, and the same in thickness. Two kindly blue eyes shone softly in an expanse of face that had been clean-shaven every Saturday night for many years, and that ended in a retreating chin and a dewlap. The limp, white shirt-collar just below was without a necktie, and the waist of his pantaloons, which seemed intended to supply this deficiency, did not quite, but only almost reached up to the unoccupied blank. He removed from his respectful head a soft gray hat, whitened here and there with flour.

"Yentlemen," he said, slowly, "you vill ugscooce me to interruptet you, – yentlemen."

"Do you wish to see me?" asked Dr. Sevier.

The German made an odd gesture of deferential assent, lifting one open hand a little in front of him to the level of his face, with the wrist bent forward and the fingers pointing down.

"Uf you bleace, Toctor, I toose; undt tat's te fust time I effer

tit vanted a toctor. Undt you mus' ugscooce me, Toctor, to callin' on you, ovver I vish you come undt see mine" —

To the surprise of all, tears gushed from his eyes.

"Mine poor vife, Toctor!" He turned to one side, pointed his broad hand toward the floor, and smote his forehead.

"I yoost come in fun mine paykery undt comin' into mine howse, fen – I see someting" – he waved his hand downward again – "someting – layin' on te – floor – face pleck ans a nigger's; undt fen I look to see who udt iss, —*udt is Mississ Reisen*! Toctor, I vish you come right off! I couldn't shtayndt udt you toandt come right avay!"

"I'll come," said the Doctor, without rising; "just write your name and address on that little white slate yonder."

"Toctor," said the German, extending and dipping his hat, "I'm ferra much a-velcome to you, Toctor; undt tat's yoost fot te pottekerra by mine corner sayt you vould too. He sayss, 'Reisen,' he sayss, 'you yoost co to Toctor Tsewier.'" He bent his great body over the farther end of the table and slowly worked out his name, street, and number. "Dtere udt iss, Toctor; I put udt town on teh schlate; ovver, I hope you ugscooce te hayndtwriding."

"Very well. That's right. That's all."

The German lingered. The Doctor gave a bow of dismission.

"That's all, I say. I'll be there in a moment. That's all. Dan, order my carriage!"

"Yentlemen, you vill ugscooce me?"

The German withdrew, returning each gentleman's bow with

a faint wave of the hat.

During this interview the more polished stranger had sat with bowed head, motionless and silent, lifting it only once and for a moment at the German's emotional outburst. Then the upward and backward turned face was marked with a commiseration partly artificial, but also partly natural. He now looked up at the Doctor.

"I shall have to leave you," said the Doctor.

"Certainly, sir," replied the other; "by all means!" The willingness was slightly overdone and the benevolence of tone was mixed with complacency. "By all means," he said again; "this is one of those cases where it is only a proper grace in the higher to yield place to the lower." He waited for a response, but the Doctor merely frowned into space and called for his boots. The visitor resumed: —

"I have a good deal of feeling, sir, for the unlettered and the vulgar. They have their station, but they have also – though doubtless in smaller capacity than we – their pleasures and pains."

Seeing the Doctor ready to go, he began to rise.

"I may not be gone long," said the physician, rather coldly; "if you choose to wait" —

"I thank you; n-no-o" – The visitor stopped between a sitting and a rising posture.

"Here are books," said the Doctor, "and the evening papers, – 'Picayune,' 'Delta,' 'True Delta.'" It seemed for a moment as

though the gentleman might sink into his seat again. “And there’s the ‘New York Herald.’”

“No, sir!” said the visitor quickly, rising and smoothing himself out; “nothing from that quarter, if you please.” Yet he smiled. The Doctor did not notice that, while so smiling, he took his card from the table. There was something familiar in the stranger’s face which the Doctor was trying to make out. They left the house together. Outside the street door the physician made apologetic allusion to their interrupted interview.

“Shall I see you at my office to-morrow? I would be happy” —

The stranger had raised his hat. He smiled again, as pleasantly as he could, which was not delightful, and said, after a moment’s hesitation: —

“ – Possibly.”

CHAPTER XI.
A PANTOMIME

It chanced one evening about this time – the vernal equinox had just passed – that from some small cause Richling, who was generally detained at the desk until a late hour, was home early. The air was soft and warm, and he stood out a little beyond his small front door-step, lifting his head to inhale the universal fragrance, and looking in every moment, through the unlighted front room, toward a part of the diminutive house where a mild rattle of domestic movements could be heard, and whence he had, a little before, been adroitly requested to absent himself. He moved restlessly on his feet, blowing a soft tune.

Presently he placed a foot on the step and a hand on the door-post, and gave a low, urgent call.

A distant response indicated that his term of suspense was nearly over. He turned about again once or twice, and a moment later Mary appeared in the door, came down upon the sidewalk, looked up into the moonlit sky and down the empty, silent street, then turned and sat down, throwing her wrists across each other in her lap, and lifting her eyes to her husband's with a smile that confessed her fatigue.

The moon was regal. It cast its deep contrasts of clear-cut light and shadow among the thin, wooden, unarchitectural forms

and weed-grown vacancies of the half-settled neighborhood, investing the matter-of-fact with mystery, and giving an unexpected charm to the unpicturesque. It was – as Richling said, taking his place beside his wife – midspring in March. As he spoke he noticed she had brought with her the odor of flowers. They were pinned at her throat.

"Where did you get them?" he asked, touching them with his fingers.

Her face lighted up.

"Guess."

How could he guess? As far as he knew neither she nor he had made an acquaintance in the neighborhood. He shook his head, and she replied: —

"The butcher."

"You're a queer girl," he said, when they had laughed.

"Why?"

"You let these common people take to you so."

She smiled, with a faint air of concern.

"You don't dislike it, do you?" she asked.

"Oh, no," he said, indifferently, and spoke of other things.

And thus they sat, like so many thousands and thousands of young pairs in this wide, free America, offering the least possible interest to the great human army round about them, but sharing, or believing they shared, in the fruitful possibilities of this land of limitless bounty, fondling their hopes and recounting the petty minutiæ of their daily experiences. Their converse was mainly in

the form of questions from Mary and answers from John.

"And did he say that he would?" etc. "And didn't you insist that he should?" etc. "I don't understand how he could require you to," etc., etc. Looking at everything from John's side, as if there never could be any other, until at last John himself laughed softly when she asked why he couldn't take part of some outdoor man's work, and give him part of his own desk-work in exchange, and why he couldn't say plainly that his work was too sedentary.

Then she proposed a walk in the moonlight, and insisted she was not tired; she wanted it on her own account. And so, when Richling had gone into the house and returned with some white worsted gauze for her head and neck and locked the door, they were ready to start.

They were tarrying a moment to arrange this wrapping when they found it necessary to move aside from where they stood in order to let two persons pass on the sidewalk.

These were a man and woman, who had at least reached middle age. The woman wore a neatly fitting calico gown; the man, a short pilot-coat. His pantaloons were very tight and pale. A new soft hat was pushed forward from the left rear corner of his closely cropped head, with the front of the brim turned down over his right eye. At each step he settled down with a little jerk alternately on this hip and that, at the same time faintly dropping the corresponding shoulder. They passed. John and Mary looked at each other with a nod of mirthful approval. Why? Because the strangers walked silently hand-in-hand.

It was a magical night. Even the part of town where they were, so devoid of character by day, had become all at once romantic with phantasmal lights and glooms, echoes and silences. Along the edge of a wide chimney-top on one blank, new hulk of a house, that nothing else could have made poetical, a mocking-bird hopped and ran back and forth, singing as if he must sing or die. The mere names of the streets they traversed suddenly became sweet food for the fancy. Down at the first corner below they turned into one that had been an old country road, and was still named Felicity.

Richling called attention to the word painted on a board. He merely pointed to it in playful silence, and then let his hand sink and rest on hers as it lay in his elbow. They were walking under the low boughs of a line of fig-trees that overhung a high garden wall. Then some gay thought took him; but when his downward glance met the eyes uplifted to meet his they were grave, and there came an instantaneous tenderness into the exchange of looks that would have been worse than uninteresting to you or me. But the next moment she brightened up, pressed herself close to him, and caught step. They had not owned each other long enough to have settled into sedate possession, though they sometimes thought they had done so. There was still a tingling ecstasy in one another's touch and glance that prevented them from quite behaving themselves when under the moon.

For instance, now, they began, though in cautious undertone, to sing. Some person approached them, and they hushed. When

the stranger had passed, Mary began again another song, alone: —

"Oh, don't you remember sweet Alice, Ben Bolt?"

"Hush!" said John, softly.

She looked up with an air of mirthful inquiry, and he added: —

"That was the name of Dr. Sevier's wife."

"But he doesn't hear me singing."

"No; but it seems as if he did."

And they sang no more.

They entered a broad, open avenue, with a treeless, grassy way in the middle, up which came a very large and lumbering street-car, with smokers' benches on the roof, and drawn by tandem horses.

"Here we turn down," said Richling, "into the way of the Naiads." (That was the street's name.) "They're not trying to get me away."

He looked down playfully. She was clinging to him with more energy than she knew.

"I'd better hold you tight," she answered. Both laughed. The nonsense of those we love is better than the finest wit on earth. They walked on in their bliss. Shall we follow? Fie!

They passed down across three or four of a group of parallel streets named for the nine muses. At Thalia they took the left,

went one square, and turned up by another street toward home.

Their conversation had flagged. Silence was enough. The great earth was beneath their feet, firm and solid; the illimitable distances of the heavens stretched above their heads and before their eyes. Here was Mary at John's side, and John at hers; John her property and she his, and time flowing softly, shiningly on. Yea, even more. If one might believe the names of the streets, there were Naiads on the left and Dryads on the right; a little farther on, Hercules; yonder corner the dark trysting-place of Bacchus and Melpomene; and here, just in advance, the corner where Terpsichore crossed the path of Apollo.

They came now along a high, open fence that ran the entire length of a square. Above it a dense rank of bitter orange-trees overhung the sidewalk, their dark mass of foliage glittering in the moonlight. Within lay a deep, old-fashioned garden. Its white shell-walks gleamed in many directions. A sweet breath came from its parterres of mingled hyacinths and jonquils that hid themselves every moment in black shadows of lagustrums and laurestines. Here, in severe order, a pair of palms, prim as mediæval queens, stood over against each other; and in the midst of the garden, rising high against the sky, appeared the pillared veranda and immense, four-sided roof of an old French colonial villa, as it stands unchanged to-day.

The two loiterers slackened their pace to admire the scene. There was much light shining from the house. Mary could hear voices, and, in a moment, words. The host was speeding his

parting guests.

"The omnibus will put you out only one block from the hotel," some one said.

Dr. Sevier, returning home from a visit to a friend in Polymnia street, had scarcely got well seated in the omnibus before he witnessed from its window a singular dumb show. He had handed his money up to the driver as they crossed Euterpe street, had received the change and deposited his fare as they passed Terpsichore, and was just sitting down when the only other passenger in the vehicle said, half-rising: —

"Hello! there's going to be a shooting scrape!"

A rather elderly man and woman on the sidewalk, both of them extremely well dressed, and seemingly on the eve of hailing the omnibus, suddenly transferred their attention to a younger couple a few steps from them, who appeared to have met them entirely by accident. The elderly lady threw out her arms toward the younger man with an expression on her face of intensest mental suffering. She seemed to cry out; but the deafening rattle of the omnibus, as it approached them, intercepted the sound. All four of the persons seemed, in various ways, to experience the most violent feelings. The young man more than once moved as if about to start forward, yet did not advance; his companion, a small, very shapely woman, clung to him excitedly and pleadingly. The older man shook a stout cane at the younger, talking furiously as he did so. He held the elderly lady to him with his arm thrown about her, while she now cast her hands

upward, now covered her face with them, now wrung them, clasped them, or extended one of them in seeming accusation against the younger person of her own sex. In a moment the omnibus was opposite the group. The Doctor laid his hand on his fellow-passenger's arm.

"Don't get out. There will be no shooting."

The young man on the sidewalk suddenly started forward, with his companion still on his farther arm, and with his eyes steadily fixed on those of the elder and taller man, a clenched fist lifted defensively, and with a tense, defiant air walked hurriedly and silently by within easy sweep of the uplifted staff. At the moment when the slight distance between the two men began to increase, the cane rose higher, but stopped short in its descent and pointed after the receding figure.

"I command you to leave this town, sir!"

Dr. Sevier looked. He looked with all his might, drawing his knee under him on the cushion and leaning out. The young man had passed. He still moved on, turning back as he went a face full of the fear that men show when they are afraid of their own violence; and, as the omnibus clattered away, he crossed the street at the upper corner and disappeared in the shadows.

"That's a very strange thing," said the other passenger to Dr. Sevier, as they resumed the corner seats by the door.

"It certainly is!" replied the Doctor, and averted his face. For when the group and he were nearest together and the moon shone brightly upon the four, he saw, beyond all question, that the older

man was his visitor of a few evenings before and that the younger pair were John and Mary Richling.

CHAPTER XII.
"SHE'S ALL THE WORLD."

Excellent neighborhood, St. Mary street, and Prytania was even better. Everybody was very retired though, it seemed. Almost every house standing in the midst of its shady garden, – sunny gardens are a newer fashion of the town, – a bell-knob on the gate-post, and the gate locked. But the Richlings cared nothing for this; not even what they should have cared. Nor was there any unpleasantness in another fact.

"Do you let this window stand wide this way when you are at work here, all day?" asked the husband. The opening alluded to was on Prytania street, and looked across the way to where the asylumed widows of "St Anna's" could glance down into it over their poor little window-gardens.

"Why, yes, dear!" Mary looked up from her little cane rocker with that thoughtful contraction at the outer corners of her eyes and that illuminated smile that between them made half her beauty. And then, somewhat more gravely and persuasively: "Don't you suppose they like it? They must like it. I think we can do that much for them. Would you rather I'd shut it?"

For answer John laid his hand on her head and gazed into her eyes.

"Take care," she whispered; "they'll see you."

He let his arm drop in amused despair.

"Why, what's the window open for? And, anyhow, they're all abed and asleep these two hours."

They did like it, those aged widows. It fed their hearts' hunger to see the pretty unknown passing and repassing that open window in the performance of her morning duties, or sitting down near it with her needle, still crooning her soft morning song, – poor, almost as poor as they, in this world's glitter; but rich in hope and courage, and rich beyond all count in the content of one who finds herself queen of ever so little a house, where love is.

"Love is enough!" said the widows.

And certainly she made it seem so. The open window brought, now and then, a moisture to the aged eyes, yet they liked it open.

But, without warning one day, there was a change. It was the day after Dr. Sevier had noticed that queer street quarrel. The window was not closed, but it sent out no more light. The song was not heard, and many small, faint signs gave indication that anxiety had come to be a guest in the little house. At evening the wife was seen in her front door and about its steps, watching in a new, restless way for her husband's coming; and when he came it could be seen, all the way from those upper windows, where one or two faces appeared now and then, that he was troubled and care-worn. There were two more days like this one; but at the end of the fourth the wife read good tidings in her husband's countenance. He handed her a newspaper, and pointed to a list

of departing passengers.

"They're gone!" she exclaimed.

He nodded, and laid off his hat. She cast her arms about his neck, and buried her head in his bosom. You could almost have seen Anxiety flying out at the window. By morning the widows knew of a certainty that the cloud had melted away.

In the counting-room one evening, as Richling said good-night with noticeable alacrity, one of his employers, sitting with his legs crossed over the top of a desk, said to his partner: —

"Richling works for his wages."

"That's all," replied the other; "he don't see his interests in ours any more than a tinsmith would, who comes to mend the roof."

The first one took a meditative puff or two from his cigar, tipped off its ashes, and responded: —

"Common fault. He completely overlooks his immense indebtedness to the world at large, and his dependence on it. He's a good fellow, and bright; but he actually thinks that he and the world are starting even."

"His wife's his world," said the other, and opened the Bills Payable book. Who will say it is not well to sail in an ocean of love? But the Richlings were becalmed in theirs, and, not knowing it, were satisfied.

Day in, day out, the little wife sat at her window, and drove her needle. Omnibuses rumbled by; an occasional wagon or cart set the dust a-flying; the street venders passed, crying the praises of their goods and wares; the blue sky grew more and more intense

as weeks piled up upon weeks; but the empty repetitions, and the isolation, and, worst of all, the escape of time, – she smiled at all, and sewed on and crooned on, in the sufficient thought that John would come, each time, when only hours enough had passed away forever.

Once she saw Dr. Sevier's carriage. She bowed brightly, but he – what could it mean? – he lifted his hat with such austere gravity. Dr. Sevier was angry. He had no definite charge to make, but that did not lessen his displeasure. After long, unpleasant wondering, and long trusting to see Richling some day on the street, he had at length driven by this way purposely to see if they had indeed left town, as they had been so imperiously commanded to do.

This incident, trivial as it was, roused Mary to thought; and all the rest of the day the thought worked with energy to dislodge the frame of mind that she had acquired from her husband.

When John came home that night and pressed her to his bosom she was silent. And when he held her off a little and looked into her eyes, and she tried to better her smile, those eyes stood full to the lashes and she looked down.

"What's the matter?" asked he, quickly.

"Nothing!" She looked up again, with a little laugh.

He took a chair and drew her down upon his lap.

"What's the matter with my girl?"

"I don't know."

"How, – you don't know?"

"Why, I simply don't. I can't make out what it is. If I could

I'd tell you; but I don't know at all." After they had sat silent a few moments: —

"I wonder" – she began.

"You wonder what?" asked he, in a rallying tone.

"I wonder if there's such a thing as being too contented."

Richling began to hum, with a playful manner: —

"'And she's all the world to me.'

Is that being too" —

"Stop!" said Mary. "That's it." She laid her hand upon his shoulder. "You've said it. That's what I ought not to be!"

"Why, Mary, what on earth" – His face flamed up "John, I'm willing to be *more* than all the rest of the world to you. I always must be that. I'm going to be that forever. And you" – she kissed him passionately – "you're all the world to me! But I've no right to be *all* the world to *you*. And you mustn't allow it. It's making it too small!"

"Mary, what are you saying?"

"Don't, John. Don't speak that way. I'm not saying anything. I'm only trying to say something, I don't know what."

"Neither do I," was the mock-rueful answer.

"I only know," replied Mary, the vision of Dr. Sevier's carriage passing before her abstracted eyes, and of the Doctor's pale face bowing austerely within it, "that if you don't take any part or interest in the outside world it'll take none in you; do you think

it will?"

"And who cares if it doesn't?" cried John, clasping her to his bosom.

"I do," she replied. "Yes, I do. I've no right to steal you from the rest of the world, or from the place in it that you ought to fill. John" —

"That's my name."

"Why can't I do something to help you?"

John lifted his head unnecessarily.

"No!"

"Well, then, let's think of something we can do, without just waiting for the wind to blow us along, – I mean," she added appeasingly, "I mean without waiting to be employed by others."

"Oh, yes; but that takes capital!"

"Yes, I know; but why don't you think up something, – some new enterprise or something, – and get somebody with capital to go in with you?"

He shook his head.

"You're out of your depth. And that wouldn't make so much difference, but you're out of mine. It isn't enough to think of something; you must know how to do it. And what do I know how to do? Nothing! Nothing that's worth doing!"

"I know one thing you could do."

"What's that?"

"You could be a professor in a college."

John smiled bitterly.

“Without antecedents?” he asked.

Their eyes met; hers dropped, and both voices were silent. Mary drew a soft sigh. She thought their talk had been unprofitable. But it had not. John laid hold of work from that day on in a better and wiser spirit.

CHAPTER XIII.
THE BOUGH BREAKS

By some trivial chance, she hardly knew what, Mary found herself one day conversing at her own door with the woman whom she and her husband had once smiled at for walking the moonlit street with her hand in willing and undisguised captivity. She was a large and strong, but extremely neat, well-spoken, and good-looking Irish woman, who might have seemed at ease but for a faintly betrayed ambition.

She praised with rather ornate English the good appearance and convenient smallness of Mary's house; said her own was the same size. That person with whom she sometimes passed "of a Sundeh" – yes, and moonlight evenings – that was her husband. He was "ferst ingineeur" on a steam-boat. There was a little, just discernible waggle in her head as she stated things. It gave her decided character.

"Ah! engineer," said Mary.

"*Ferst* ingineeur," repeated the woman; "you know there bees ferst ingineeurs, an' secon' ingineeurs, an' therd ingineeurs. Yes." She unconsciously fanned herself with a dust-pan that she had just bought from a tin peddler.

She lived only some two or three hundred yards away, around the corner, in a tidy little cottage snuggled in among larger houses

in Coliseum street. She had had children, but she had lost them; and Mary's sympathy when she told her of them – the girl and two boys – won the woman as much as the little lady's pretty manners had dazed her. It was not long before she began to drop in upon Mary in the hour of twilight, and sit through it without speaking often, or making herself especially interesting in any way, but finding it pleasant, notwithstanding.

"John," said Mary, – her husband had come in unexpectedly, – "our neighbor, Mrs. Riley."

John's bow was rather formal, and Mrs. Riley soon rose and said good-evening.

"John," said the wife again, laying her hands on his shoulders as she tiptoed to kiss him, "what troubles you?" Then she attempted a rallying manner: "Don't my friends suit you?"

He hesitated only an instant, and said: —

"Oh, yes, that's all right!"

"Well, then, I don't see why you look so."

"I've finished the task I was to do."

"What! you haven't" —

"I'm out of employment."

They went and sat down on the little hair-cloth sofa that Mrs. Riley had just left.

"I thought they said they would have other work for you."

"They said they might have; but it seems they haven't."

"And it's just in the opening of summer, too," said Mary; "why, what right" —

"Oh!" – a despairing gesture and averted gaze – "they've a perfect right if they think best. I asked them that myself at first – not too politely, either; but I soon saw I was wrong."

They sat without speaking until it had grown quite dark. Then John said, with a long breath, as he rose: —

"It passes my comprehension."

"What passes it?" asked Mary, detaining him by one hand.

"The reason why we are so pursued by misfortunes."

"But, John," she said, still holding him, "*is* it misfortune? When I know so well that you deserve to succeed, I think maybe it's good fortune in disguise, after all. Don't you think it's possible? You remember how it was last time, when A., B., & Co. failed. Maybe the best of all is to come now!" She beamed with courage. "Why, John, it seems to me I'd just go in the very best of spirits, the first thing to-morrow, and tell Dr. Sevier you are looking for work. Don't you think it might" —

"I've been there."

"Have you? What did he say?"

"He wasn't in."

There was another neighbor, with whom John and Mary did not get acquainted. Not that it was more his fault than theirs; it may have been less. Unfortunately for the Richlings there was in their dwelling no toddling, self-appointed child commissioner to find his way in unwatched moments to the play-ground of some other toddler, and so plant the good seed of neighbor acquaintanceship.

This neighbor passed four times a day. A man of fortune, aged a hale sixty or so, who came and stood on the corner, and sometimes even rested a foot on Mary's door-step, waiting for the Prytania omnibus, and who, on his returns, got down from the omnibus step a little gingerly, went by Mary's house, and presently shut himself inside a very ornamental iron gate, a short way up St. Mary street. A child would have made him acquainted. Even as it was, they did not escape his silent notice. It was pleasant for him, from whose life the early dew had been dried away by a well-risen sun, to recall its former freshness by glimpses of this pair of young beginners. It was like having a bird's nest under his window.

John, stepping backward from his door one day, saying a last word to his wife, who stood on the threshold, pushed against this neighbor as he was moving with somewhat cumbersome haste to catch the stage, turned quickly, and raised his hat.

"Pardon!"

The other uncovered his bald head and circlet of white, silken locks, and hurried on to the conveyance.

"President of one of the banks down-town," whispered John.

That is the nearest they ever came to being acquainted. And even this accident might not have occurred had not the man of snowy locks been glancing at Mary as he passed instead of at his omnibus.

As he sat at home that evening he remarked: —

"Very pretty little woman that, my dear, that lives in the little

house at the corner; who is she?"

The lady responded, without lifting her eyes from the newspaper in which she was interested; she did not know. The husband mused and twirled his penknife between a finger and thumb.

"They seem to be starting at the bottom," he observed.

"Yes?"

"Yes; much the same as we did."

"I haven't noticed them particularly."

"They're worth noticing," said the banker.

He threw one fat knee over the other, and laid his head on the back of his easy-chair.

The lady's eyes were still on her paper, but she asked: —

"Would you like me to go and see them?"

"No, no – unless you wish."

She dropped the paper into her lap with a smile and a sigh.

"Don't propose it. I have so much going to do" – She paused, removed her glasses, and fell to straightening the fringe of the lamp-mat. "Of course, if you think they're in need of a friend; but from your description" —

"No," he answered, quickly, "not at all. They've friends, no doubt. Everything about them has a neat, happy look. That's what attracted my notice. They've got friends, you may depend." He ceased, took up a pamphlet, and adjusted his glasses. "I think I saw a sofa going in there to-day as I came to dinner. A little expansion, I suppose."

"It was going out," said the only son, looking up from a story-book.

But the banker was reading. He heard nothing, and the word was not repeated. He did not divine that a little becalmed and befogged bark, with only two lovers in her, too proud to cry "Help!" had drifted just yonder upon the rocks, and, spar by spar and plank by plank, was dropping into the smooth, unmerciful sea.

Before the sofa went there had gone, little by little, some smaller valuables.

"You see," said Mary to her husband, with the bright hurry of a wife bent upon something high-handed, "we both have to have furniture; we must have it; and I don't have to have jewelry. Don't you see?"

"No, I" —

"Now, John!" There could be but one end to the debate; she had determined that. The first piece was a bracelet. "No, I wouldn't pawn it," she said. "Better sell it outright at once."

But Richling could not but cling to hope and to the adornments that had so often clasped her wrists and throat or pinned the folds upon her bosom. Piece by piece he pawned them, always looking out ahead with strained vision for the improbable, the incredible, to rise to his relief.

"Is *nothing* going to happen, Mary?"

Yes; nothing happened – except in the pawn-shop.

So, all the sooner, the sofa had to go.

"It's no use talking about borrowing," they both said. Then the bureau went. Then the table. Then, one by one, the chairs. Very slyly it was all done, too. Neighbors mustn't know. "Who lives there?" is a question not asked concerning houses as small as theirs; and a young man, in a well-fitting suit of only too heavy goods, removing his winter hat to wipe the standing drops from his forehead; and a little blush-rose woman at his side, in a mist of cool muslin and the cunningest of millinery, – these, who always paused a moment, with a lost look, in the vestibule of the sepulchral-looking little church on the corner of Prytania and Josephine streets, till the sexton ushered them in, and who as often contrived, with no end of ingenuity, despite the little woman's fresh beauty, to get away after service unaccosted by the elders, – who could imagine that *these* were from so deep a nook in poverty's vale?

There was one person who guessed it: Mrs. Riley, who was not asked to walk in any more when she called at the twilight hour. She partly saw and partly guessed the truth, and offered what each one of the pair had been secretly hoping somebody, anybody, would offer – a loan. But when it actually confronted them it was sweetly declined.

"Wasn't it kind?" said Mary; and John said emphatically, "Yes." Very soon it was their turn to be kind to Mrs. Riley. They attended her husband's funeral. He had been killed by an explosion. Mrs. Riley beat upon the bier with her fists, and wailed in a far-reaching voice: —

“O Mike, Mike! Me jew’l, me jew’l! Why didn’t ye wait to see the babe that’s unborn?”

And Mary wept. And when she and John reëntered their denuded house she fell upon his neck with fresh tears, and kissed him again and again, and could utter no word, but knew he understood. Poverty was so much better than sorrow! She held him fast, and he her, while he tenderly hushed her, lest a grief, the very opposite of Mrs. Riley’s, should overtake her.

CHAPTER XIV.
HARD SPEECHES AND HIGH TEMPER

Dr. Sevier found occasion, one morning, to speak at some length, and very harshly, to his book-keeper. He had hardly ceased when John Richling came briskly in.

"Doctor," he said, with great buoyancy, "how do you do?"

The physician slightly frowned.

"Good-morning, Mr. Richling."

Richling was tamed in an instant; but, to avoid too great a contrast of manner, he retained a semblance of sprightliness, as he said: —

"This is the first time I have had this pleasure since you were last at our house, Doctor."

"Did you not see me one evening, some time ago, in the omnibus?" asked Dr. Sevier.

"Why, no," replied the other, with returning pleasure; "was I in the same omnibus?"

"You were on the sidewalk."

"No-o," said Richling, pondering. "I've seen you in your carriage several times, but you" —

"I didn't see you."

Richling was stung. The conversation failed. He

recommenced it in a tone pitched intentionally too low for the alert ear of Narcisse.

"Doctor, I've simply called to say to you that I'm out of work and looking for employment again."

"Um – hum," said the Doctor, with a cold fulness of voice that hurt Richling afresh. "You'll find it hard to get anything this time of year," he continued, with no attempt at undertone; "it's very hard for anybody to get anything these days, even when well recommended."

Richling smiled an instant. The Doctor did not, but turned partly away to his desk, and added, as if the smile had displeased him: —

"Well, maybe you'll not find it so."

Richling turned fiery red.

"Whether I do or not," he said, rising, "my affairs sha'n't trouble anybody. Good-morning!"

He started out.

"How's Mrs. Richling?" asked the Doctor.

"She's well," responded Richling, putting on his hat and disappearing in the corridor. Each footstep could be heard as he went down the stairs.

"He's a fool!" muttered the physician.

He looked up angrily, for Narcisse stood before him.

"Well, Doctah," said the Creole, hurriedly arranging his coat-collar, and drawing his handkerchief, "I'm goin' ad the poss-office."

"See here, sir!" exclaimed the Doctor, bringing his fist down upon the arm of his chair, "every time you've gone out of this office for the last six months you've told me you were going to the post-office; now don't you ever tell me that again!"

The young man bowed with injured dignity and responded: —

"All a-ight, seh."

He overtook Richling just outside the street entrance. Richling had halted there, bereft of intention, almost of outward sense, and choking with bitterness. It seemed to him as if in an instant all his misfortunes, disappointments, and humiliations, that never before had seemed so many or so great, had been gathered up into the knowledge of that hard man upstairs, and, with one unmerciful downward wrench, had received his seal of approval. Indignation, wrath, self-hatred, dismay, in undefined confusion, usurped the faculties of sight and hearing and motion.

"Mistoo Itchlin," said Narcisse, "I 'ope you fine you'seff O.K., seh, if you'll egscuse the slang expwession."

Richling started to move away, but checked himself.

"I'm well, sir, thank you, sir; yes, sir, I'm very well."

"I billieve you, seh. You ah lookin' well."

Narcisse thrust his hands into his pockets, and turned upon the outer sides of his feet, the embodiment of sweet temper. Richling found him a wonderful relief at the moment. He quit gnawing his lip and winking into vacancy, and felt a malicious good-humor run into all his veins.

"I dunno 'ow 'tis, Mistoo Itchlin," said Narcisse, "but I muz

tell you the tooth; you always 'ave to me the appe'ance ligue the chile of p'ospe'ity."

"Eh?" said Richling, hollowing his hand at his ear, – "child of" —

"P'ospe'ity?"

"Yes – yes," replied the deaf man vaguely, "I – have a relative of that name."

"Oh!" exclaimed the Creole, "thass good faw luck! Mistoo Itchlin, look' like you a lil mo' hawd to yeh – but egscuse me. I s'pose you muz be advancing in business, Mistoo Itchlin. I say I s'pose you muz be gittin' along!"

"I? Yes; yes, I must."

He started.

"I'm 'appy to yeh it!" said Narcisse.

His innocent kindness was a rebuke. Richling began to offer a cordial parting salutation, but Narcisse said: —

"You goin' that way? Well, I kin go that way."

They went.

"I was goin' ad the poss-office, but" – he waved his hand and curled his lip. "Mistoo Itchlin, in fact, if you yeh of something suitable to me I would like to yeh it. I am not satisfied with that pless yondeh with Doctah Seveeah. I was compel this mawnin', biffo you came in, to 'epoove 'im faw 'is 'oodness. He called me a jackass, in fact. I woon allow that. I 'ad to 'epoove 'im. 'Doctah Seveeah,' says I, 'don't you call me a jackass ag'in!' An' 'e din call it me ag'in. No, seh. But 'e din like to 'ush up. Thass the rizz'n 'e

was a lil miscutteous to you. Me, I am always polite. As they say, 'A nod is juz as good as a kick f'om a bline hoss.' You are fon' of maxim, Mistoo Itchlin? Me, I'm ve'y fon' of them. But they's got one maxim what you may 'ave 'eard – I do not fine that maxim always come t'ue. 'Ave you evva yeah that maxim, 'A fool faw luck'? That don't always come t'ue. I 'ave discove'd that."

"No," responded Richling, with a parting smile, "that doesn't always come true."

Dr. Sevier denounced the world at large, and the American nation in particular, for two days. Within himself, for twenty-four hours, he grumly blamed Richling for their rupture; then for twenty-four hours reproached himself, and, on the morning of the third day knocked at the door, corner of St. Mary and Prytania.

No one answered. He knocked again. A woman in bare feet showed herself at the corresponding door-way in the farther half of the house.

"Nobody don't live there no more, sir," she said.

"Where have they gone?"

"Well, reely, I couldn't tell you, sir. Because, reely, I don't know nothing about it. I haint but jest lately moved in here myself, and I don't know nothing about nobody around here scarcely at all."

The Doctor shut himself again in his carriage and let himself be whisked away, in great vacuity of mind.

"They can't blame anybody but themselves," was, by-and-by,

his rallying thought. “Still” – he said to himself after another vacant interval, and said no more. The thought that whether *they* could blame others or not did not cover all the ground, rested heavily on him.

CHAPTER XV.
THE CRADLE FALLS

In the rear of the great commercial centre of New Orleans, on that part of Common street where it suddenly widens out, broad, unpaved, and dusty, rises the huge dull-brown structure of brick, famed, well-nigh as far as the city is known, as the Charity Hospital.

Twenty-five years ago, when the emigrant ships used to unload their swarms of homeless and friendless strangers into the streets of New Orleans to fall a prey to yellow-fever or cholera, that solemn pile sheltered thousands on thousands of desolate and plague-stricken Irish and Germans, receiving them unquestioned, until at times the very floors were covered with the sick and dying, and the sawing and hammering in the coffin-shop across the inner court ceased not day or night. Sombre monument at once of charity and sin! For, while its comfort and succor cost the houseless wanderer nothing, it lived and grew, and lives and grows still, upon the licensed vices of the people, – drinking, harlotry, and gambling.

The Charity Hospital of St. Charles – such is its true name – is, however, no mere plague-house. Whether it ought to be, let doctors decide. How good or necessary such modern innovations as "ridge ventilation," "movable bases," the "pavilion

plan," "trained nurses," etc., may be, let the Auxiliary Sanitary Association say. There it stands as of old, innocent of all sins that may be involved in any of these changes, rising story over story, up and up: here a ward for poisonous fevers, and there a ward for acute surgical cases; here a story full of simple ailments, and there a ward specially set aside for women.

In 1857 this last was Dr. Sevier's ward. Here, at his stated hour one summer morning in that year, he tarried a moment, yonder by that window, just where you enter the ward and before you come to the beds. He had fallen into discourse with some of the more inquiring minds among the train of students that accompanied him, and waited there to finish and cool down to a physician's proper temperature. The question was public sanitation.

He was telling a tall Arkansan, with high-combed hair, self-conscious gloves, and very broad, clean-shaven lower jaw, how the peculiar formation of delta lands, by which they drain away from the larger watercourses, instead of into them, had made the swamp there in the rear of the town, for more than a century, "the common dumping-ground and cesspool of the city, sir!"

Some of the students nodded convincedly to the speaker; some looked askance at the Arkansan, who put one forearm meditatively under his coat-tail; some looked through the window over the regions alluded to, and some only changed their pose and looked around for a mirror.

The Doctor spoke on. Several of his hearers were really

interested in the then unusual subject, and listened intelligently as he pointed across the low plain at hundreds of acres of land that were nothing but a morass, partly filled in with the foulest refuse of a semi-tropical city, and beyond it where still lay the swamp, half cleared of its forest and festering in the sun – "every drop of its waters, and every inch of its mire," said the Doctor, "saturated with the poisonous drainage of the town!"

"I happen," interjected a young city student; but the others bent their ear to the Doctor, who continued: —

"Why, sir, were these regions compactly built on, like similar areas in cities confined to narrow sites, the mortality, with the climate we have, would be frightful."

"I happen to know," essayed the city student; but the Arkansan had made an interrogatory answer to the Doctor, that led him to add: —

"Why, yes; you see the houses here on these lands are little, flimsy, single ground-story affairs, loosely thrown together, and freely exposed to sun and air."

"I hap – ," said the city student.

"And yet," exclaimed the Doctor, "Malaria is king!"

He paused an instant for his hearers to take in the figure.

"Doctor, I happen to" —

Some one's fist from behind caused the speaker to turn angrily, and the Doctor resumed: —

"Go into any of those streets off yonder, – Trémé, Prieur, Marais. Why, there are often ponds under the houses! The floors

of bedrooms are within a foot or two of these ponds! The bricks of the surrounding pavements are often covered with a fine, dark moss! Water seeps up through the sidewalks! That's his realm, sir! Here and there among the residents – every here and there – you'll see his sallow, quaking subjects dragging about their work or into and out of their beds, until a fear of a fatal ending drives them in here. Congestion? Yes, sometimes congestion pulls them under suddenly, and they're gone before they know it. Sometimes their vitality wanes slowly, until Malaria beckons in Consumption."

"Why, Doctor," said the city student, ruffling with pride of his town, "there are plenty of cities as bad as this. I happen to know, for instance" —

Dr. Sevier turned away in quiet contempt.

"It will not improve our town to dirty others, or to clean them, either."

He moved down the ward, while two or three members among the moving train, who never happened to know anything, nudged each other joyfully.

The group stretched out and came along, the Doctor first and the young men after, some of one sort, some of another, – the dull, the frivolous, the earnest, the kind, the cold, – following slowly, pausing, questioning, discoursing, advancing, moving from each clean, slender bed to the next, on this side and on that, down and up the long sanded aisles, among the poor, sick women.

Among these, too, there was variety. Some were stupid and

ungracious, hardened and dulled with long penury as some in this world are hardened and dulled with long riches. Some were as fat as beggars; some were old and shrivelled; some were shrivelled and young; some were bold; some were frightened; and here and there was one almost fair.

Down at the far end of one aisle was a bed whose occupant lay watching the distant, slowly approaching group with eyes of unspeakable dread. There was not a word or motion, only the steadfast gaze. Gradually the throng drew near. The faces of the students could be distinguished. This one was coarse; that one was gentle; another was sleepy; another trivial and silly; another heavy and sour; another tender and gracious. Presently the tones of the Doctor's voice could be heard, soft, clear, and without that trumpet quality that it had beyond the sick-room. How slowly, yet how surely, they came! The patient's eyes turned away toward the ceiling; they could not bear the slowness of the encounter. They closed; the lips moved in prayer. The group came to the bed that was only the fourth away; then to the third; then to the second. There they pause some minutes. Now the Doctor approaches the very next bed. Suddenly he notices this patient. She is a small woman, young, fair to see, and, with closed eyes and motionless form, is suffering an agony of consternation. One startled look, a suppressed exclamation, two steps forward, – the patient's eyes slowly open. Ah, me! It is Mary Richling.

"Good-morning, madam," said the physician, with a cold and distant bow; and to the students, "We'll pass right along to the

other side," and they moved into the next aisle.

"I am a little pressed for time this morning," he presently remarked, as the students showed some unwillingness to be hurried. As soon as he could he parted with them and returned to the ward alone.

As he moved again down among the sick, straight along this time, turning neither to right nor left, one of the Sisters of Charity – the hospital and its so-called nurses are under their oversight – touched his arm. He stopped impatiently.

"Well, Sister" – (bowing his ear).

"I – I – the – the" – His frown had scared away her power of speech.

"Well, what is it, Sister?"

"The – the last patient down on this side" —

He was further displeased. "*I'll* attend to the patients, Sister," he said; and then, more kindly, "I'm going there now. No, you stay here, if you please." And he left her behind.

He came and stood by the bed. The patient gazed on him.

"Mrs. Richling," he softly began, and had to cease.

She did not speak or move; she tried to smile, but her eyes filled, her lips quivered.

"My dear madam," exclaimed the physician, in a low voice, "what brought you here?"

The answer was inarticulate, but he saw it on the moving lips.

"Want," said Mary.

"But your husband?" He stooped to catch the husky answer.

"Home."

"Home?" He could not understand. "Not gone to – back – up the river?"

She slowly shook her head: "No, home. In Prieur street."

Still her words were riddles. He could not see how she had come to this. He stood silent, not knowing how to utter his thought. At length he opened his lips to speak, hesitated an instant, and then asked: —

"Mrs. Richling, tell me plainly, has your husband gone wrong?"

Her eyes looked up a moment, upon him, big and staring, and suddenly she spoke: —

"O Doctor! My husband go wrong? John go wrong?" The eyelids closed down, the head rocked slowly from side to side on the flat hospital pillow, and the first two tears he had ever seen her shed welled from the long lashes and slipped down her cheeks.

"My poor child!" said the Doctor, taking her hand in his. "No, no! God forgive me! He hasn't gone wrong; he's not going wrong. You'll tell me all about it when you're stronger."

The Doctor had her removed to one of the private rooms of the pay-ward, and charged the Sisters to take special care of her. "Above all things," he murmured, with a beetling frown, "tell that thick-headed nurse not to let her know that this is at anybody's expense. Ah, yes; and when her husband comes, tell him to see me at my office as soon as he possibly can."

As he was leaving the hospital gate he had an afterthought. "I might have left a note." He paused, with his foot on the carriage-step. "I suppose they'll tell him," – and so he got in and drove off, looking at his watch.

On his second visit, although he came in with a quietly inspiring manner, he had also, secretly, the feeling of a culprit. But, midway of the room, when the young head on the pillow turned its face toward him, his heart rose. For the patient smiled. As he drew nearer she slid out her feeble hand. "I'm glad I came here," she murmured.

"Yes," he replied; "this room is much better than the open ward."

"I didn't mean this room," she said. "I meant the whole hospital."

"The whole hospital!" He raised his eyebrows, as to a child.

"Ah! Doctor," she responded, her eyes kindling, though moist.

"What, my child?"

She smiled upward to his bent face.

"The poor – mustn't be ashamed of the poor, must they?"

The Doctor only stroked her brow, and presently turned and addressed his professional inquiries to the nurse. He went away. Just outside the door he asked the nurse: —

"Hasn't her husband been here?"

"Yes," was the reply, "but she was asleep, and he only stood there at the door and looked in a bit. He trembled," the unintelligent woman added, for the Doctor seemed waiting to

hear more, – "he trembled all over; and that's all he did, excepting his saying her name over to himself like, over and over, and wiping of his eyes."

"And nobody told him anything?"

"Oh, not a word, sir!" came the eager answer.

"You didn't tell him to come and see me?"

The woman gave a start, looked dismayed, and began: —

"N-no, sir; you didn't tell" —

"Um – hum," growled the Doctor. He took out a card and wrote on it. "Now see if you can remember to give him that."

CHAPTER XVI.
MANY WATERS

As the day faded away it began to rain. The next morning the water was coming down in torrents. Richling, looking out from a door in Prieur street, found scant room for one foot on the inner edge of the sidewalk; all the rest was under water. By noon the sidewalks were completely covered in miles of streets. By two in the afternoon the flood was coming into many of the houses. By three it was up at the door-sill on which he stood. There it stopped.

He could do nothing but stand and look. Skiffs, canoes, hastily improvised rafts, were moving in every direction, carrying the unsightly chattels of the poor out of their overflowed cottages to higher ground. Barrels, boxes, planks, hen-coops, bridge lumber, piles of straw that waltzed solemnly as they went, cord-wood, old shingles, door-steps, floated here and there in melancholy confusion; and down upon all still drizzled the slackening rain. At length it ceased.

Richling still stood in the door-way, the picture of mute helplessness. Yes, there was one other thing he could do; he could laugh. It would have been hard to avoid it sometimes, there were such ludicrous sights, – such slips and sprawls into the water; so there he stood in that peculiar isolation that deaf people content

themselves with, now looking the picture of anxious waiting, now indulging a low, deaf man's chuckle when something made the rowdies and slatterns of the street roar.

Presently he noticed, at a distance up the way, a young man in a canoe, passing, much to their good-natured chagrin, a party of three in a skiff, who had engaged him in a trial of speed. From both boats a shower of hilarious French was issuing. At the nearest corner the skiff party turned into another street and disappeared, throwing their lingual fireworks to the last. The canoe came straight on with the speed of a fish. Its dexterous occupant was no other than Narcisse.

There was a grace in his movement that kept Richling's eyes on him, when he would rather have withdrawn into the house. Down went the paddle always on the same side, noiselessly, in front; on darted the canoe; backward stretched the submerged paddle and came out of the water edgewise at full reach behind, with an almost imperceptible swerving motion that kept the slender craft true to its course. No rocking; no rush of water before or behind; only the one constant glassy ripple gliding on either side as silently as a beam of light. Suddenly, without any apparent change of movement in the sinewy wrists, the narrow shell swept around in a quarter circle, and Narcisse sat face to face with Richling.

Each smiled brightly at the other. The handsome Creole's face was aglow with the pure delight of existence.

"Well, Mistoo Itchlin, 'ow you enjoyin' that watah? As fah as

myseff am concerned, 'I am afloat, I am afloat on the fee-us 'olling tide.' I don't think you fine that stweet pwetty dusty to-day, Mistoo Itchlin?"

Richling laughed.

"It don't inflame my eyes to-day," he said.

"You muz egscuse my i'ony, Mistoo Itchlin; I can't 'ep that sometime'. It come natu'al to me, in fact. I was on'y speaking i'oniously juz now in calling allusion to that dust; because, of co'se, theh is no dust to-day, because the g'ound is all covvud with watah, in fact. Some people don't understand that figgah of i'ony."

"I don't understand as much about it myself as I'd like to," said Richling.

"Me, I'm ve'y fon' of it," responded the Creole. "I was making seve'al i'onies ad those fwen' of mine juz now. We was 'unning a 'ace. An' thass anotheh thing I am fon' of. I would 'ather 'un a 'ace than to wuck faw a livin'. Ha! ha! ha! I should thing so! Anybody would, in fact. But thass the way with me – always making some i'onies." He stopped with a sudden change of countenance, and resumed gravely: "Mistoo Itchlin, looks to me like you' lookin' ve'y salad." He fanned himself with his hat. "I dunno 'ow 'tis with you, Mistoo Itchlin, but I fine myseff ve'y oppwessive thiz evening."

"I don't find you so," said Richling, smiling broadly.

And he did not. The young Creole's burning face and resplendent wit were a sunset glow in the darkness of this day

of overpowering adversity. His presence even supplied, for a moment, what seemed a gleam of hope. Why wasn't there here an opportunity to visit the hospital? He need not tell Narcisse the object of his visit.

"Do you think," asked Richling, persuasively, crouching down upon one of his heels, "that I could sit in that thing without turning it over?"

"In that pee-ogue?" Narcisse smiled the smile of the proficient as he waved his paddle across the canoe. "Mistoo Itchlin," – the smile passed off, – "I dunno if you'll billiv me, but at the same time I muz tell you the tooth?" —

He paused inquiringly.

"Certainly," said Richling, with evident disappointment.

"Well, it's juz a poss'bil'ty that you'll wefwain fum spillin' out fum yeh till the negs cawneh. Thass the manneh of those who ah not acquainted with the pee-ogue. 'Lost to sight, to memo'y deah' – if you'll egscuse the maxim. Thass Chawles Dickens mague use of that egspwession."

Richling answered with a gay shake of the head. "I'll keep out of it." If Narcisse detected his mortified chagrin, he did not seem to. It was hard; the day's last hope was blown out like a candle in the wind. Richling dared not risk the wetting of his suit of clothes; they were his sole letter of recommendation and capital in trade.

"Well, *au 'evoi'*, Mistoo Itchlin." He turned and moved off – dip, glide, and away.

Dr. Sevier stamped his wet feet on the pavement of the hospital porch. It was afternoon of the day following that of the rain. The water still covering the streets about the hospital had not prevented his carriage from splashing through it on his double daily round. A narrow and unsteady plank spanned the immersed sidewalk. Three times, going and coming, he had crossed it safely, and this fourth time he had made half the distance well enough; but, hearing distant cheers and laughter, he looked up street; when – splatter! – and the cheers were redoubled.

"Pretty thing to laugh at!" he muttered. Two or three bystanders, leaning on their umbrellas in the lodge at the gate and in the porch, where he stood stamping, turned their backs and smoothed their mouths.

"Hah!" said the tall Doctor, stamping harder. Stamp! – stamp! He shook his leg. – "Bah!" He stamped the other long, slender, wet foot and looked down at it, turning one side and then the other. – "F-fah!" – The first one again. – "Pshaw!" – The other. – Stamp! – stamp! – "*Right—into* it! – up to my *ankles!*" He looked around with a slight scowl at one man, who seemed taken with a sudden softening of the spine and knees, and who turned his back quickly and fell against another, who, also with his back turned, was leaning tremulously against a pillar.

But the object of mirth did not tarry. He went as he was to Mary's room, and found her much better – as, indeed, he had done at every visit. He sat by her bed and listened to her story.

"Why, Doctor, you see, we did nicely for a while. John went

on getting the same kind of work, and pleasing everybody, of course, and all he lacked was finding something permanent. Still, we passed through one month after another, and we really began to think the sun was coming out, so to speak."

"Well, I thought so, too," put in the Doctor. "I thought if it didn't you'd let me know."

"Why, no, Doctor, we couldn't do that; you couldn't be taking care of well people."

"Well," said the Doctor, dropping that point, "I suppose as the busy season began to wane that mode of livelihood, of course, disappeared."

"Yes," – a little one-sided smile, – "and so did our money. And then, of course," – she slightly lifted and waved her hand.

"You had to live," said Dr. Sevier, sincerely.

She smiled again, with abstracted eyes. "We thought we'd like to," she said. "I didn't mind the loss of the things so much, – except the little table we ate from. You remember that little round table, don't you?"

The visitor had not the heart to say no. He nodded.

"When that went there was but one thing left that could go."

"Not your bed?"

"The bedstead; yes."

"You didn't sell your bed, Mrs. Richling?"

The tears gushed from her eyes. She made a sign of assent.

"But then," she resumed, "we made an excellent arrangement with a good woman who had just lost her husband, and wanted

to live cheaply, too."

"What amuses you, madam?"

"Nothing great. But I wish you knew her. She's funny. Well, so we moved down-town again. Didn't cost much to move."

She would smile a little in spite of him.

"And then?" said he, stirring impatiently and leaning forward. "What then?"

"Why, then I worked a little harder than I thought, – pulling trunks around and so on, – and I had this third attack."

The Doctor straightened himself up, folded his arms, and muttered: —

"Oh! – oh! *Why* wasn't I instantly sent for?"

The tears were in her eyes again, but —

"Doctor," she answered, with her odd little argumentative smile, "how could we? We had nothing to pay with. It wouldn't have been just."

"Just!" exclaimed the physician, angrily.

"Doctor," said the invalid, and looked at him.

"Oh – all right!"

She made no answer but to look at him still more pleadingly.

"Wouldn't it have been just as fair to let me be generous, madam?" His faint smile was bitter. "For once? Simply for once?"

"We couldn't make that proposition, could we, Doctor?"

He was checkmated.

"Mrs. Richling," he said suddenly, clasping the back of his

chair as if about to rise, "tell me, – did you or your husband act this way for anything I've ever said or done?"

"No, Doctor! no, no; never! But" —

"But kindness should seek – not be sought," said the physician, starting up.

"No, Doctor, we didn't look on it so. Of course we didn't. If there's any fault it's all mine. For it was my own proposition to John, that as we *had* to seek charity we should just be honest and open about it. I said, 'John, as I need the best attention, and as that can be offered free only in the hospital, why, to the hospital I ought to go.'"

She lay still, and the Doctor pondered. Presently he said: —

"And Mr. Richling – I suppose he looks for work all the time?"

"From daylight to dark!"

"Well, the water is passing off. He'll be along by and by to see you, no doubt. Tell him to call, first thing to-morrow morning, at my office." And with that the Doctor went off in his wet boots, committed a series of indiscretions, reached home, and fell ill.

In the wanderings of fever he talked of the Richlings, and in lucid moments inquired for them.

"Yes, yes," answered the sick Doctor's physician, "they're attended to. Yes, all their wants are supplied. Just dismiss them from your mind." In the eyes of this physician the Doctor's life was invaluable, and these patients, or pensioners, an unknown and, most likely, an inconsiderable quantity; two sparrows, as it were, worth a farthing. But the sick man lay thinking. He

frowned.

"I wish they would go home."

"I have sent them."

"You have? Home to Milwaukee?"

"Yes."

"Thank God!"

He soon began to mend. Yet it was weeks before he could leave the house. When one day he reëntered the hospital, still pale and faint, he was prompt to express to the Mother-Superior the comfort he had felt in his sickness to know that his brother physician had sent those Richlings to their kindred.

The Sister shook her head. He saw the deception in an instant. As best his strength would allow, he hurried to the keeper of the rolls. There was the truth. Home? Yes, – to Prieur street, – discharged only one week before. He drove quickly to his office.

"Narcisse, you will find that young Mr. Richling living in Prieur street, somewhere between Conti and St. Louis. I don't know the house; you'll have to find it. Tell him I'm in my office again, and to come and see me."

Narcisse was no such fool as to say he knew the house. He would get the praise of finding it quickly.

"I'll do my mose awduous, seh," he said, took down his coat, hung up his jacket, put on his hat, and went straight to the house and knocked. Got no answer. Knocked again, and a third time; but in vain. Went next door and inquired of a pretty girl, who fell in love with him at a glance.

"Yes, but they had moved. She wasn't *jess ezac'ly* sure where they *had* moved to, *unless-n* it was in that little house yondeh between St. Louis and Toulouse; and if they wasn't there she didn't know *where* they was. People ought to leave words where they's movin' at, but they don't. You're very welcome," she added, as he expressed his thanks; and he would have been welcome had he questioned her for an hour. His parting bow and smile stuck in her heart a six-months.

He went to the spot pointed out. As a Creole he was used to seeing very respectable people living in very small and plain houses. This one was not too plain even for his ideas of Richling, though it was but a little one-street-door-and-window affair, with an alley on the left running back into the small yard behind. He knocked. Again no one answered. He looked down the alley and saw, moving about the yard, a large woman, who, he felt certain, could not be Mrs. Richling.

Two little short-skirted, bare-legged girls were playing near him. He spoke to them in French. Did they know where Monsieu' Itchlin lived? The two children repeated the name, looking inquiringly at each other.

"*Non, miché.*" – "No, sir, they didn't know."

"*Qui reste ici?*" he asked. "Who lives here?"

"*Ici? Madame qui reste là c'est Mizziz Ri-i-i-ly!*" said one.

"Yass," said the other, breaking into English and rubbing a musquito off of her well-tanned shank with the sole of her foot, "tis Mizziz Ri-i-i-ly what live there. She jess move een. She's

got a lill baby. – Oh! you means dat lady what was in de Chatty Hawspill!"

"No, no! A real, nice *lady*. She nevva saw that Cha'ity Hospi'l."

The little girls shook their heads. They couldn't imagine a person who had never seen the Charity Hospital.

"Was there nobody else who had moved into any of these houses about here lately?" He spoke again in French. They shook their heads. Two boys came forward and verified the testimony. Narcisse went back with his report: "Moved, – not found."

"I fine that ve'y d'oll, Doctah Seveeah," concluded the unaugmented, hanging up his hat; "some peop' always 'ard to fine. I h-even notiz that sem thing w'en I go to colic' some bill. I dunno 'ow' tis, Doctah, but I assu' you I kin tell that by a man's physio'nomie. Nobody teach me that. 'Tis my own in*geen*u'ty 'as made me to discoveh that, in fact."

The Doctor was silent. Presently he drew a piece of paper toward him and, dipping his pen into the ink, began to write: —

"Information wanted of the whereabouts of John Richling" —

"Narcisse," he called, still writing, "I want you to take an advertisement to the 'Picayune' office."

"With the gweatez of pleazheh, seh." The clerk began his usual shifting of costume. "Yesseh! I assu' you, Doctah, that is a p'oposition moze enti'ly to my satizfagtion; faw I am suffe'ing faw a smoke, and deztitute of a ciga'ette! I am aztonizh' 'ow I did that, to egshauz them unconsciouzly, in fact." He received

the advertisement in an envelope, whipped his shoes a little with his handkerchief, and went out. One would think to hear him thundering down the stairs, that it was twenty-five cents' worth of ice.

"Hold o – " The Doctor started from his seat, then turned and paced feebly up and down. Who, besides Richling, might see that notice? What might be its unexpected results? Who was John Richling? A man with a secret at the best; and a secret, in Dr. Sevier's eyes, was detestable. Might not Richling be a man who had fled from something? "No! no!" The Doctor spoke aloud. He had promised to think nothing ill of him. Let the poor children have their silly secret. He spoke again: "They'll find out the folly of it by and by." He let the advertisement go; and it went.

CHAPTER XVII.
RAPHAEL RISTOFALO

Richling had a dollar in his pocket. A man touched him on the shoulder.

But let us see. On the day that John and Mary had sold their only bedstead, Mrs. Riley, watching them, had proposed the joint home. The offer had been accepted with an eagerness that showed itself in nervous laughter. Mrs. Riley then took quarters in Prieur street, where John and Mary, for a due consideration, were given a single neatly furnished back room. The bedstead had brought seven dollars. Richling, on the day after the removal, was in the commercial quarter, looking, as usual, for employment.

The young man whom Dr. Sevier had first seen, in the previous October, moving with a springing step and alert, inquiring glances from number to number in Carondelet street was slightly changed. His step was firm, but something less elastic, and not quite so hurried. His face was more thoughtful, and his glance wanting in a certain dancing freshness that had been extremely pleasant. He was walking in Poydras street toward the river.

As he came near to a certain man who sat in the entrance of a store with the freshly whittled corner of a chair between

his knees, his look and bow were grave, but amiable, quietly hearty, deferential, and also self-respectful – and uncommercial: so palpably uncommercial that the sitter did not rise or even shut his knife.

He slightly stared. Richling, in a low, private tone, was asking him for employment.

"What?" turning his ear up and frowning downward.

The application was repeated, the first words with a slightly resentful ring, but the rest more quietly.

The store-keeper stared again, and shook his head slowly.

"No, sir," he said, in a barely audible tone. Richling moved on, not stopping at the next place, or the next, or the next; for he felt the man's stare all over his back until he turned the corner and found himself in Tchoupitoulas street. Nor did he stop at the first place around the corner. It smelt of deteriorating potatoes and up-river cabbages, and there were open barrels of onions set ornamentally aslant at the entrance. He had a fatal conviction that his services would not be wanted in malodorous places.

"Now, isn't that a shame?" asked the chair-whittler, as Richling passed out of sight. "Such a gentleman as that, to be beggin' for work from door to door!"

"He's not beggin' f'om do' to do'," said a second, with a Creole accent on his tongue, and a match stuck behind his ear like a pen. "Beside, he's too *much* of a gennlemun."

"That's where you and him differs," said the first. He frowned upon the victim of his delicate repartee with make-believe

defiance. Number Two drew from an outside coat-pocket a wad of common brown wrapping-paper, tore from it a small, neat parallelogram, dove into an opposite pocket for some loose smoking-tobacco, laid a pinch of it in the paper, and, with a single dexterous turn of the fingers, thumbs above, the rest beneath, – it looks simple, but 'tis an amazing art, – made a cigarette. Then he took down his match, struck it under his short coat-skirt, lighted his cigarette, drew an inhalation through it that consumed a third of its length, and sat there, with his eyes half-closed, and all that smoke somewhere inside of him.

"That young man," remarked a third, wiping a toothpick on his thigh and putting it in his vest-pocket, as he stepped to the front, "don't know how to *look* fur work. There's one way fur a day-laborer to look fur work, and there's another way fur a gentleman to look fur work, and there's another way fur a – a – a man with money to look fur somethin' to put his money into. *It's just like fishing!*" He threw both hands outward and downward, and made way for a porter's truck with a load of green meat. The smoke began to fall from Number Two's nostrils in two slender blue streams. Number Three continued: —

"You've got to know what kind o' hooks you want, and what kind o' bait you want, and then, after *that*, you've" —

Numbers One and Two did not let him finish.

" – Got to know how to fish," they said; "that's so!" The smoke continued to leak slowly from Number Two's nostrils and teeth, though he had not lifted his cigarette the second time.

"Yes, you've got to know how to fish," reaffirmed the third. "If you don't know how to fish, it's as like as not that nobody can tell you what's the matter; an' yet, all the same, you aint goin' to ketch no fish."

"Well, now," said the first man, with an unconvinced swing of his chin, "*spunk* 'll sometimes pull a man through; and you can't say he aint spunky." Number Three admitted the corollary. Number Two looked up: his chance had come.

"He'd a w'ipped you faw a dime," said he to Number One, took a comforting draw from his cigarette, and felt a great peace.

"I take notice he's a little deaf," said Number Three, still alluding to Richling.

"That'd spoil him for me," said Number One.

Number Three asked why.

"Oh, I just wouldn't have him about me. Didn't you ever notice that a deaf man always seems like a sort o' stranger? I can't bear 'em."

Richling meanwhile moved on. His critics were right. He was not wanting in courage; but no man from the moon could have been more an alien on those sidewalks. He was naturally diligent, active, quick-witted, and of good, though maybe a little too scholarly address; quick of temper, it is true, and uniting his quickness of temper with a certain bashfulness, – an unlucky combination, since, as a consequence, nobody had to get out of its way; but he was generous in fact and in speech, and never held malice a moment. But, besides the heavy odds which his small

secret seemed to be against him, stopping him from accepting such valuable friendships as might otherwise have come to him, and besides his slight deafness, he was by nature a recluse, or, at least, a dreamer. Every day that he set foot on Tchoupitoulas, or Carondelet, or Magazine, or Fulton, or Poydras street he came from a realm of thought, seeking service in an empire of matter.

There is a street in New Orleans called Triton *Walk*. That is what all the ways of commerce and finance and daily bread-getting were to Richling. He was a merman – ashore. It was the feeling rather than the knowledge of this that prompted him to this daily, aimless trudging after mere employment. He had a proper pride; once in a while a little too much; nor did he clearly see his deficiencies; and yet the unrecognized consciousness that he had not the commercial instinct made him willing – as Number Three would have said – to "cut bait" for any fisherman who would let him do it.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.