CHARLES WADDELL CHESNUTT

THE COLONEL'S DREAM

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Содержание

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DEDICATION

To the great number of those who are seeking, in whatever manner or degree, from near at hand or far away, to bring the forces of enlightenment to bear upon the vexed problems which harass the South, this volume is inscribed, with the hope that it may contribute to the same good end.

If there be nothing new between its covers, neither is love new, nor faith, nor hope, nor disappointment, nor sorrow. Yet life is not the less worth living because of any of these, nor has any man truly lived until he has tasted of them all.

LIST OF CHARACTERS

Colonel Henry French, A RETIRED MERCHANT	
Mr. Kirby, *Mrs. Jerviss*,	HIS FORMER PARTNERS
Philip French, THE COLONEL'S SON	
Peter French, HIS OLD SERVANT	
Mrs. Treadwell, AN OLD LADY	
Miss Laura Treadwell, HER DAUGHTER	
Graciella Treadwell, HER GRANDDAUGHTER	
Malcolm Dudley, A TREASURE-SEEKER	
Ben Dudley, HIS NEPHEW	
Viney, HIS HOUSEKEEPER	
William Fetters, A CONVICT LABOUR CONTRACTOR	
Barclay Fetters, HIS SON	
Bud Johnson, A CONVICT LABOURER	
Caroline, HIS WIFE	
Henry Taylor, A NEGRO SCHOOLMASTER	

One

Two gentlemen were seated, one March morning in 189—, in the private office of French and Company, Limited, on lower Broadway. Mr. Kirby, the junior partner—a man of thirty-five, with brown hair and mustache, clean-cut, handsome features, and an alert manner, was smoking cigarettes almost as fast as he could roll them, and at the same time watching the electric clock upon the wall and getting up now and then to stride restlessly back and forth across the room.

Mr. French, the senior partner, who sat opposite Kirby, was an older man—a safe guess would have placed him somewhere in the debatable ground between forty and fifty; of a good height, as could be seen even from the seated figure, the upper part of which was held erect with the unconscious ease which one associates with military training. His closely cropped brown hair had the slightest touch of gray. The spacious forehead, deep-set gray eyes, and firm chin, scarcely concealed by a light beard, marked the thoughtful man of affairs. His face indeed might have seemed austere, but for a sensitive mouth, which suggested a reserve of humour and a capacity for deep feeling. A man of well-balanced character, one would have said, not apt to undertake anything lightly, but sure to go far in whatever he took in hand; quickly responsive to a generous impulse, and capable of a righteous indignation; a good friend, a dangerous enemy; more

likely to be misled by the heart than by the head; of the salt of the earth, which gives it savour.

Mr. French sat on one side, Mr. Kirby on the other, of a handsome, broad-topped mahogany desk, equipped with telephones and push buttons, and piled with papers, account books and letter files in orderly array. In marked contrast to his partner's nervousness, Mr. French scarcely moved a muscle, except now and then to take the cigar from his lips and knock the ashes from the end.

"Nine fifty!" ejaculated Mr. Kirby, comparing the clock with his watch. "Only ten minutes more."

Mr. French nodded mechanically. Outside, in the main office, the same air of tense expectancy prevailed. For two weeks the office force had been busily at work, preparing inventories and balance sheets. The firm of French and Company, Limited, manufacturers of crashes and burlaps and kindred stuffs, with extensive mills in Connecticut, and central offices in New York, having for a long time resisted the siren voice of the promoter, had finally faced the alternative of selling out, at a sacrifice, to the recently organised bagging trust, or of meeting a disastrous competition. Expecting to yield in the end, they had fought for position—with brilliant results. Negotiations for a sale, upon terms highly favourable to the firm, had been in progress for several weeks; and the two partners were awaiting, in their private office, the final word. Should the sale be completed, they were richer men than they could have hoped to be after ten years more

of business stress and struggle; should it fail, they were heavy losers, for their fight had been expensive. They were in much the same position as the player who had staked the bulk of his fortune on the cast of a die. Not meaning to risk so much, they had been drawn into it; but the game was worth the candle.

"Nine fifty-five," said Kirby. "Five minutes more!"

He strode over to the window and looked out. It was snowing, and the March wind, blowing straight up Broadway from the bay, swept the white flakes northward in long, feathery swirls. Mr. French preserved his rigid attitude, though a close observer might have wondered whether it was quite natural, or merely the result of a supreme effort of will.

Work had been practically suspended in the outer office. The clerks were also watching the clock. Every one of them knew that the board of directors of the bagging trust was in session, and that at ten o'clock it was to report the result of its action on the proposition of French and Company, Limited. The clerks were not especially cheerful; the impending change meant for them, at best, a change of masters, and for many of them, the loss of employment. The firm, for relinquishing its business and good will, would receive liberal compensation; the clerks, for their skill, experience, and prospects of advancement, would receive their discharge. What else could be expected? The principal reason for the trust's existence was economy of administration; this was stated, most convincingly, in the prospectus. There was no suggestion, in that model document, that competition

would be crushed, or that, monopoly once established, labour must sweat and the public groan in order that a few captains, or chevaliers, of industry, might double their dividends. Mr. French may have known it, or guessed it, but he was between the devil and the deep sea—a victim rather than an accessory—he must take what he could get, or lose what he had.

"Nine fifty-nine!"

Kirby, as he breathed rather than spoke the words, threw away his scarcely lighted cigarette, and gripped the arms of his chair spasmodically. His partner's attitude had not varied by a hair's breadth; except for the scarcely perceptible rise and fall of his chest he might have been a wax figure. The pallor of his countenance would have strengthened the illusion.

Kirby pushed his chair back and sprung to his feet. The clock marked the hour, but nothing happened. Kirby was wont to say, thereafter, that the ten minutes that followed were the longest day of his life. But everything must have an end, and their suspense was terminated by a telephone call. Mr. French took down the receiver and placed it to his ear.

"It's all right," he announced, looking toward his partner. "Our figures accepted—resolution adopted—settlement to-morrow. We are–"

The receiver fell upon the table with a crash. Mr. French toppled over, and before Kirby had scarcely realised that something was the matter, had sunk unconscious to the floor, which, fortunately, was thickly carpeted.

It was but the work of a moment for Kirby to loosen his partner's collar, reach into the recesses of a certain drawer in the big desk, draw out a flask of brandy, and pour a small quantity of the burning liquid down the unconscious man's throat. A push on one of the electric buttons summoned a clerk, with whose aid Mr. French was lifted to a leather-covered couch that stood against the wall. Almost at once the effect of the stimulant was apparent, and he opened his eyes.

"I suspect," he said, with a feeble attempt at a smile, "that I must have fainted—like a woman—perfectly ridiculous."

"Perfectly natural," replied his partner. "You have scarcely slept for two weeks—between the business and Phil—and you've reached the end of your string. But it's all over now, except the shouting, and you can sleep a week if you like. You'd better go right up home. I'll send for a cab, and call Dr. Moffatt, and ask him to be at the hotel by the time you reach it. I'll take care of things here to-day, and after a good sleep you'll find yourself all right again."

"Very well, Kirby," replied Mr. French, "I feel as weak as water, but I'm all here. It might have been much worse. You'll call up Mrs. Jerviss, of course, and let her know about the sale?"

When Mr. French, escorted to the cab by his partner, and accompanied by a clerk, had left for home, Kirby rang up the doctor, and requested him to look after Mr. French immediately. He then called for another number, and after the usual delay, first because the exchange girl was busy, and then because the

line was busy, found himself in communication with the lady for whom he had asked.

"It's all right, Mrs. Jerviss," he announced without preliminaries. "Our terms accepted, and payment to be made, in cash and bonds, as soon as the papers are executed, when you will be twice as rich as you are to-day."

"Thank you, Mr. Kirby! And I suppose I shall never have another happy moment until I know what to do with it. Money is a great trial. I often envy the poor."

Kirby smiled grimly. She little knew how near she had been to ruin. The active partners had mercifully shielded her, as far as possible, from the knowledge of their common danger. If the worst happened, she must know, of course; if not, then, being a woman whom they both liked—she would be spared needless anxiety. How closely they had skirted the edge of disaster she did not learn until afterward; indeed, Kirby himself had scarcely appreciated the true situation, and even the senior partner, since he had not been present at the meeting of the trust managers, could not know what had been in their minds.

But Kirby's voice gave no hint of these reflections. He laughed a cheerful laugh. "If the world only knew," he rejoined, "it would cease to worry about the pains of poverty, and weep for the woes of wealth."

"Indeed it would!" she replied, with a seriousness which seemed almost sincere. "Is Mr. French there? I wish to thank him, too."

"No, he has just gone home."

"At this hour?" she exclaimed, "and at such a time? What can be the matter? Is Phil worse?"

"No, I think not. Mr. French himself had a bad turn, for a few minutes, after we learned the news."

Faces are not yet visible over the telephone, and Kirby could not see that for a moment the lady's grew white. But when she spoke again the note of concern in her voice was very evident.

"It was nothing—serious?"

"Oh, no, not at all, merely overwork, and lack of sleep, and the suspense—and the reaction. He recovered almost immediately, and one of the clerks went home with him."

"Has Dr. Moffatt been notified?" she asked.

"Yes, I called him up at once; he'll be at the Mercedes by the time the patient arrives."

There was a little further conversation on matters of business, and Kirby would willingly have prolonged it, but his news about Mr. French had plainly disturbed the lady's equanimity, and Kirby rang off, after arranging to call to see her in person after business hours.

Mr. Kirby hung up the receiver with something of a sigh.

"A fine woman," he murmured, "I could envy French his chances, though he doesn't seem to see them—that is, if I were capable of envy toward so fine a fellow and so good a friend. It's curious how clearsighted a man can be in some directions, and how blind in others."

Mr. French lived at the Mercedes, an uptown apartment hotel overlooking Central Park. He had scarcely reached his apartment, when the doctor arrived—a tall, fair, fat practitioner, and one of the best in New York; a gentleman as well, and a friend, of Mr. French.

"My dear fellow," he said, after a brief examination, "you've been burning the candle at both ends, which, at your age won't do at all. No, indeed! No, indeed! You've always worked too hard, and you've been worrying too much about the boy, who'll do very well now, with care. You've got to take a rest—it's all you need. You confess to no bad habits, and show the signs of none; and you have a fine constitution. I'm going to order you and Phil away for three months, to some mild climate, where you'll be free from business cares and where the boy can grow strong without having to fight a raw Eastern spring. You might try the Riviera, but I'm afraid the sea would be too much for Phil just yet; or southern California—but the trip is tiresome. The South is nearer at hand. There's Palm Beach, or Jekyll Island, or Thomasville, Asheville, or Aiken—somewhere down in the pine country. It will be just the thing for the boy's lungs, and just the place for you to rest. Start within a week, if you can get away. In fact, you've *got* to get away."

Mr. French was too weak to resist—both body and mind seemed strangely relaxed—and there was really no reason why he should not go. His work was done. Kirby could attend to the formal transfer of the business. He would take a long journey

to some pleasant, quiet spot, where he and Phil could sleep, and dream and ride and drive and grow strong, and enjoy themselves. For the moment he felt as though he would never care to do any more work, nor would he need to, for he was rich enough. He would live for the boy. Phil's education, his health, his happiness, his establishment in life—these would furnish occupation enough for his well-earned retirement.

It was a golden moment. He had won a notable victory against greed and craft and highly trained intelligence. And yet, a year later, he was to recall this recent past with envy and regret; for in the meantime he was to fight another battle against the same forces, and others quite as deeply rooted in human nature. But he was to fight upon a new field, and with different weapons, and with results which could not be foreseen.

But no premonition of impending struggle disturbed Mr. French's pleasant reverie; it was broken in a much more agreeable manner by the arrival of a visitor, who was admitted by Judson, Mr. French's man. The visitor was a handsome, clear-eyed, fair-haired woman, of thirty or thereabouts, accompanied by another and a plainer woman, evidently a maid or companion. The lady was dressed with the most expensive simplicity, and her graceful movements were attended by the rustle of unseen silks. In passing her upon the street, any man under ninety would have looked at her three times, the first glance instinctively recognising an attractive woman, the second ranking her as a lady; while the third, had there been time and opportunity, would have been the

long, lingering look of respectful or regretful admiration.

"How is Mr. French, Judson?" she inquired, without dissembling her anxiety.

"He's much better, Mrs. Jerviss, thank you, ma'am."

"I'm very glad to hear it; and how is Phil?"

"Quite bright, ma'am, you'd hardly know that he'd been sick. He's gaining strength rapidly; he sleeps a great deal; he's asleep now, ma'am. But, won't you step into the library? There's a fire in the grate, and I'll let Mr. French know you are here."

But Mr. French, who had overheard part of the colloquy, came forward from an adjoining room, in smoking jacket and slippers.

"How do you do?" he asked, extending his hand. "It was mighty good of you to come to see me."

"And I'm awfully glad to find you better," she returned, giving him her slender, gloved hand with impulsive warmth. "I might have telephoned, but I wanted to see for myself. I felt a part of the blame to be mine, for it is partly for me, you know, that you have been overworking."

"It was all in the game," he said, "and we have won. But sit down and stay awhile. I know you'll pardon my smoking jacket. We are partners, you know, and I claim an invalid's privilege as well."

The lady's fine eyes beamed, and her fair cheek flushed with pleasure. Had he only realised it, he might have claimed of her any privilege a woman can properly allow, even that of conducting her to the altar. But to him she was only, thus far, as

she had been for a long time, a very good friend of his own and of Phil's; a former partner's widow, who had retained her husband's interest in the business; a wholesome, handsome woman, who was always excellent company and at whose table he had often eaten, both before and since her husband's death. Nor, despite Kirby's notions, was he entirely ignorant of the lady's partiality for himself.

"Doctor Moffatt has ordered Phil and me away, for three months," he said, after Mrs. Jerviss had inquired particularly concerning his health and Phil's.

"Three months!" she exclaimed with an accent of dismay. "But you'll be back," she added, recovering herself quickly, "before the vacation season opens?"

"Oh, certainly; we shall not leave the country."

"Where are you going?"

"The doctor has prescribed the pine woods. I shall visit my old home, where I was born. We shall leave in a day or two."

"You must dine with me to-morrow," she said warmly, "and tell me about your old home. I haven't had an opportunity to thank you for making me rich, and I want your advice about what to do with the money; and I'm tiring you now when you ought to be resting."

"Do not hurry," he said. "It is almost a pleasure to be weak and helpless, since it gives me the privilege of a visit from you."

She lingered a few moments and then went. She was the embodiment of good taste and knew when to come and when

to go.

Mr. French was conscious that her visit, instead of tiring him, had had an opposite effect; she had come and gone like a pleasant breeze, bearing sweet odours and the echo of distant music. Her shapely hand, when it had touched his own, had been soft but firm; and he had almost wished, as he held it for a moment, that he might feel it resting on his still somewhat fevered brow. When he came back from the South, he would see a good deal of her, either at the seaside, or wherever she might spend the summer.

When Mr. French and Phil were ready, a day or two later, to start upon their journey, Kirby was at the Mercedes to see them off.

"You're taking Judson with you to look after the boy?" he asked.

"No," replied Mr. French, "Judson is in love, and does not wish to leave New York. He will take a vacation until we return. Phil and I can get along very well alone."

Kirby went with them across the ferry to the Jersey side, and through the station gates to the waiting train. There was a flurry of snow in the air, and overcoats were comfortable. When Mr. French had turned over his hand luggage to the porter of the Pullman, they walked up and down the station platform.

"I'm looking for something to interest us," said Kirby, rolling a cigarette. "There's a mining proposition in Utah, and a trolley railroad in Oklahoma. When things are settled up here, I'll take a run out, and look the ground over, and write to you."

"My dear fellow," said his friend, "don't hurry. Why should I make any more money? I have all I shall ever need, and as much as will be good for Phil. If you find a good thing, I can help you finance it; and Mrs. Jerviss will welcome a good investment. But I shall take a long rest, and then travel for a year or two, and after that settle down and take life comfortably."

"That's the way you feel now," replied Kirby, lighting another cigarette, "but wait until you are rested, and you'll yearn for the fray; the first million only whets the appetite for more."

"All aboard!"

The word was passed along the line of cars. Kirby took leave of Phil, into whose hand he had thrust a five-dollar bill, "To buy popcorn on the train," he said, kissed the boy, and wrung his ex-partner's hand warmly.

"Good-bye," he said, "and good luck. You'll hear from me soon. We're partners still, you and I and Mrs. Jerviss."

And though Mr. French smiled acquiescence, and returned Kirby's hand clasp with equal vigour and sincerity, he felt, as the train rolled away, as one might feel who, after a long sojourn in an alien land, at last takes ship for home. The mere act of leaving New York, after the severance of all compelling ties, seemed to set in motion old currents of feeling, which, moving slowly at the start, gathered momentum as the miles rolled by, until his heart leaped forward to the old Southern town which was his destination, and he soon felt himself chafing impatiently at any delay that threatened to throw the train behind schedule time.

"He'll be back in six weeks," declared Kirby, when Mrs. Jerviss and he next met. "I know him well; he can't live without his club and his counting room. It is hard to teach an old dog new tricks."

"And I'm sure he'll not stay away longer than three months," said the lady confidently, "for I have invited him to my house party."

"A privilege," said Kirby gallantly, "for which many a man would come from the other end of the world."

But they were both mistaken. For even as they spoke, he whose future each was planning, was entering upon a new life of his own, from which he was to look back upon his business career as a mere period of preparation for the real end and purpose of his earthly existence.

Two

The hack which the colonel had taken at the station after a two-days' journey, broken by several long waits for connecting trains, jogged in somewhat leisurely fashion down the main street toward the hotel. The colonel, with his little boy, had left the main line of railroad leading north and south and had taken at a certain way station the one daily train for Clarendon, with which the express made connection. They had completed the forty-mile journey in two or three hours, arriving at Clarendon at noon.

It was an auspicious moment for visiting the town. It is true that the grass grew in the street here and there, but the sidewalks were separated from the roadway by rows of oaks and elms and china-trees in early leaf. The travellers had left New York in the midst of a snowstorm, but here the scent of lilac and of jonquil, the song of birds, the breath of spring, were all about them. The occasional stretches of brick sidewalk under their green canopy looked cool and inviting; for while the chill of winter had fled and the sultry heat of summer was not yet at hand, the railroad coach had been close and dusty, and the noonday sun gave some slight foretaste of his coming reign.

The colonel looked about him eagerly. It was all so like, and yet so different—shrunken somewhat, and faded, but yet, like a woman one loves, carried into old age something of the charm of youth. The old town, whose ripeness was almost decay, whose

quietness was scarcely distinguishable from lethargy, had been the home of his youth, and he saw it, strange to say, less with the eyes of the lad of sixteen who had gone to the war, than with those of the little boy to whom it had been, in his tenderest years, the great wide world, the only world he knew in the years when, with his black boy Peter, whom his father had given to him as a personal attendant, he had gone forth to field and garden, stream and forest, in search of childish adventure. Yonder was the old academy, where he had attended school. The yellow brick of its walls had scaled away in places, leaving the surface mottled with pale splotches; the shingled roof was badly dilapidated, and overgrown here and there with dark green moss. The cedar trees in the yard were in need of pruning, and seemed, from their rusty trunks and scant leafage, to have shared in the general decay. As they drove down the street, cows were grazing in the vacant lot between the bank, which had been built by the colonel's grandfather, and the old red brick building, formerly a store, but now occupied, as could be seen by the row of boxes visible through the open door, by the post-office.

The little boy, an unusually handsome lad of five or six, with blue eyes and fair hair, dressed in knickerbockers and a sailor cap, was also keenly interested in the surroundings. It was Saturday, and the little two-wheeled carts, drawn by a steer or a mule; the pigs sleeping in the shadow of the old wooden market-house; the lean and sallow pinelanders and listless negroes dozing on the curbstone, were all objects of novel interest to the boy,

as was manifest by the light in his eager eyes and an occasional exclamation, which in a clear childish treble, came from his perfectly chiselled lips. Only a glance was needed to see that the child, though still somewhat pale and delicate from his recent illness, had inherited the characteristics attributed to good blood. Features, expression, bearing, were marked by the signs of race; but a closer scrutiny was required to discover, in the blue-eyed, golden-haired lad, any close resemblance to the shrewd, dark man of affairs who sat beside him, and to whom this little boy was, for the time being, the sole object in life.

But for the child the colonel was alone in the world. Many years before, when himself only a boy, he had served in the Southern army, in a regiment which had fought with such desperate valour that the honour of the colonelcy had come to him at nineteen, as the sole survivor of the group of young men who had officered the regiment. His father died during the last year of the Civil War, having lived long enough to see the conflict work ruin to his fortunes. The son had been offered employment in New York by a relative who had sympathised with the South in her struggle; and he had gone away from Clarendon. The old family "mansion"—it was not a very imposing structure, except by comparison with even less pretentious houses—had been sold upon foreclosure, and bought by an ambitious mulatto, who only a few years before had himself been an object of barter and sale. Entering his uncle's office as a clerk, and following his advice, reinforced by a sense of the fitness of things, the youthful colonel

had dropped his military title and become plain Mr. French. Putting the past behind him, except as a fading memory, he had thrown himself eagerly into the current of affairs. Fortune favoured one both capable and energetic. In time he won a partnership in the firm, and when death removed his relative, took his place at its head.

He had looked forward to the time, not very far in the future, when he might retire from business and devote his leisure to study and travel, tastes which for years he had subordinated to the pursuit of wealth; not entirely, for his life had been many sided; and not so much for the money, as because, being in a game where dollars were the counters, it was his instinct to play it well. He was winning already, and when the bagging trust paid him, for his share of the business, a sum double his investment, he found himself, at some years less than fifty, relieved of business cares and in command of an ample fortune.

This change in the colonel's affairs—and we shall henceforth call him the colonel, because the scene of this story is laid in the South, where titles are seldom ignored, and where the colonel could hardly have escaped his own, even had he desired to do so—this change in the colonel's affairs coincided with that climacteric of the mind, from which, without ceasing to look forward, it turns, at times, in wistful retrospect, toward the distant past, which it sees thenceforward through a mellowing glow of sentiment. Emancipated from the counting room, and ordered South by the doctor, the colonel's thoughts turned easily

and naturally to the old town that had given him birth; and he felt a twinge of something like remorse at the reflection that never once since leaving it had he set foot within its borders. For years he had been too busy. His wife had never manifested any desire to visit the South, nor was her temperament one to evoke or sympathise with sentimental reminiscence. He had married, rather late in life, a New York woman, much younger than himself; and while he had admired her beauty and they had lived very pleasantly together, there had not existed between them the entire union of souls essential to perfect felicity, and the current of his life had not been greatly altered by her loss.

Toward little Phil, however, the child she had borne him, his feeling was very different. His young wife had been, after all, but a sweet and pleasant graft upon a sturdy tree. Little Phil was flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone. Upon his only child the colonel lavished all of his affection. Already, to his father's eye, the boy gave promise of a noble manhood. His frame was graceful and active. His hair was even more brightly golden than his mother's had been; his eyes more deeply blue than hers; while his features were a duplicate of his father's at the same age, as was evidenced by a faded daguerreotype among the colonel's few souvenirs of his own childhood. Little Phil had a sweet temper, a loving disposition, and endeared himself to all with whom he came in contact.

The hack, after a brief passage down the main street, deposited the passengers at the front of the Clarendon Hotel.

The colonel paid the black driver the quarter he demanded—two dollars would have been the New York price—ran the gauntlet of the dozen pairs of eyes in the heads of the men leaning back in the splint-bottomed armchairs under the shade trees on the sidewalk, registered in the book pushed forward by a clerk with curled mustaches and pomatumed hair, and accompanied by Phil, followed the smiling black bellboy along a passage and up one flight of stairs to a spacious, well-lighted and neatly furnished room, looking out upon the main street.

Three

When the colonel and Phil had removed the dust and disorder of travel from their appearance, they went down to dinner. After they had eaten, the colonel, still accompanied by the child, left the hotel, and following the main street for a short distance, turned into another thoroughfare bordered with ancient elms, and stopped for a moment before an old gray house with high steps and broad piazza—a large, square-built, two-storied house, with a roof sloping down toward the front, broken by dormer windows and buttressed by a massive brick chimney at either end. In spite of the gray monotone to which the paintless years had reduced the once white weatherboarding and green Venetian blinds, the house possessed a certain stateliness of style which was independent of circumstance, and a solidity of construction that resisted sturdily the disintegrating hand of time. Heart-pine and live-oak, mused the colonel, like other things Southern, live long and die hard. The old house had been built of the best materials, and its woodwork dowelled and mortised and tongued and grooved by men who knew their trade and had not learned to scamp their work. For the colonel's grandfather had built the house as a town residence, the family having owned in addition thereto a handsome country place upon a large plantation remote from the town.

The colonel had stopped on the opposite side of the street

and was looking intently at the home of his ancestors and of his own youth, when a neatly dressed coloured girl came out on the piazza, seated herself in a rocking-chair with an air of proprietorship, and opened what the colonel perceived to be, even across the street, a copy of a woman's magazine whose circulation, as he knew from the advertising rates that French and Co. had paid for the use of its columns, touched the million mark. Not wishing to seem rude, the colonel moved slowly on down the street. When he turned his head, after going a rod or two, and looked back over his shoulder, the girl had risen and was re-entering the house. Her disappearance was promptly followed by the notes of a piano, slightly out of tune, to which some one —presumably the young woman—was singing in a high voice, which might have been better had it been better trained,

> "I dreamt that I dwe-elt in ma-arble halls
> With vassals and serfs at my si-i-ide."

The colonel had slackened his pace at the sound of the music, but, after the first few bars, started forward with quickened footsteps which he did not relax until little Phil's weight, increasing momentarily, brought home to him the consciousness that his stride was too long for the boy's short legs. Phil, who was a thoroughbred, and would have dropped in his tracks without complaining, was nevertheless relieved when his father's pace returned to the normal.

Their walk led down a hill, and, very soon, to a wooden bridge which spanned a creek some twenty feet below. The colonel paused for a moment beside the railing, and looked up and down the stream. It seemed narrower and more sluggish than his memory had pictured it. Above him the water ran between high banks grown thick with underbrush and over-arching trees; below the bridge, to the right of the creek, lay an open meadow, and to the left, a few rods away, the ruins of the old Eureka cotton mill, which in his boyhood had harboured a flourishing industry, but which had remained, since Sherman's army laid waste the country, the melancholy ruin the colonel had seen it last, when twenty-five years or more before, he left Clarendon to seek a wider career in the outer world. The clear water of the creek rippled harmoniously down a gentle slope and over the site where the great dam at the foot had stood, while birds were nesting in the vines with which kindly nature had sought to cloak the dismantled and crumbling walls.

Mounting the slope beyond the bridge, the colonel's stride now carefully accommodated to the child's puny step, they skirted a low brick wall, beyond which white headstones gleamed in a mass of verdure. Reaching an iron gate, the colonel lifted the latch, and entered the cemetery which had been the object of their visit.

"Is this the place, papa?" asked the little boy.

"Yes, Phil, but it is farther on, in the older part."

They passed slowly along, under the drooping elms and

willows, past the monuments on either hand—here, resting on a low brick wall, a slab of marble, once white, now gray and moss-grown, from which the hand of time had well nigh erased the carved inscription; here a family vault, built into the side of a mound of earth, from which only the barred iron door distinguished it; here a pedestal, with a time-worn angel holding a broken fragment of the resurrection trumpet; here a prostrate headstone, and there another bending to its fall; and among them a profusion of rose bushes, on some of which the early roses were already blooming—scarcely a well-kept cemetery, for in many lots the shrubbery grew in wild unpruned luxuriance; nor yet entirely neglected, since others showed the signs of loving care, and an effort had been made to keep the walks clean and clear.

Father and son had traversed half the width of the cemetery, when they came to a spacious lot, surrounded by large trees and containing several monuments. It seemed less neglected than the lots about it, and as they drew nigh they saw among the tombs a very black and seemingly aged Negro engaged in pruning a tangled rose tree. Near him stood a dilapidated basket, partially filled with weeds and leaves, into which he was throwing the dead and superfluous limbs. He seemed very intent upon his occupation, and had not noticed the colonel's and Phil's approach until they had paused at the side of the lot and stood looking at him.

When the old man became aware of their presence, he straightened himself up with the slow movement of one stiff with

age or rheumatism and threw them a tentatively friendly look out of a pair of faded eyes.

"Howdy do, uncle," said the colonel. "Will you tell me whose graves these are that you are caring for?"

"Yas, suh," said the old man, removing his battered hat respectfully—the rest of his clothing was in keeping, a picturesque assortment of rags and patches such as only an old Negro can get together, or keep together—"dis hyuh lot, suh, b'longs ter de fambly dat I useter b'long ter—de ol' French fambly, suh, de fines' fambly in Beaver County."

"Why, papa!" cried little Phil, "he means–"

"Hush, Phil! Go on, uncle."

"Yas, suh, de fines' fambly in Cla'endon, suh. Dis hyuh headstone hyuh, suh, an' de little stone at de foot, rep'esents de grave er ol' Gin'al French, w'at fit in de Revolution' Wah, suh; and dis hyuh one nex' to it is de grave er my ol' marster, Majah French, w'at fit in de Mexican Wah, and died endyoin' de wah wid de Yankees, suh."

"Papa," urged Phil, "that's my–"

"Shut up, Phil! Well, uncle, did this interesting old family die out, or is it represented in the present generation?"

"Lawd, no, suh, de fambly did n' die out—'deed dey did n' die out! dey ain't de kind er fambly ter die out! But it's mos' as bad, suh—dey's moved away. Young Mars Henry went ter de Norf, and dey say he's got rich; but he ain't be'n back no mo', suh, an' I don' know whether he's ever comin' er no."

"You must have been very fond of them to take such good care of their graves," said the colonel, much moved, but giving no sign.

"Well, suh, I b'longed ter de fambly, an' I ain' got no chick ner chile er my own, livin', an' dese hyuh dead folks 'pears mo' closer ter me dan anybody e'se. De cullud folks don' was'e much time wid a ole man w'at ain' got nothin', an' dese hyuh new w'ite folks wa't is come up sence de wah, ain' got no use fer niggers, now dat dey don' b'long ter nobody no mo'; so w'en I ain' got nothin' e'se ter do, I comes roun' hyuh, whar I knows ev'ybody and ev'ybody knows me, an' trims de rose bushes an' pulls up de weeds and keeps de grass down jes' lak I s'pose Mars Henry'd 'a' had it done ef he'd 'a' lived hyuh in de ole home, stidder 'way off yandah in de Norf, whar he so busy makin' money dat he done fergot all 'bout his own folks."

"What is your name?" asked the colonel, who had been looking closely at the old man.

"Peter, suh—Peter French. Most er de niggers change' dey names after de wah, but I kept de ole fambly name I wuz raise' by. It wuz good 'nuff fer me, suh; dey ain' none better."

"Oh, papa," said little Phil, unable to restrain himself longer, "he must be some kin to us; he has the same name, and belongs to the same family, and you know you called him 'Uncle.'"

The old Negro had dropped his hat, and was staring at the colonel and the little boy, alternately, with dawning amazement, while a look of recognition crept slowly into his rugged old face.

"Look a hyuh, suh," he said tremulously, "is it?—it can't be!—but dere's de eyes, an' de nose, an' de shape er de head—why, it *must* be my young Mars Henry!"

"Yes," said the colonel, extending his hand to the old man, who grasped it with both his own and shook it up and down with unconventional but very affectionate vigour, "and you are my boy Peter; who took care of me when I was no bigger than Phil here!"

This meeting touched a tender chord in the colonel's nature, already tuned to sympathy with the dead past of which Peter seemed the only survival. The old man's unfeigned delight at their meeting; his retention of the family name, a living witness of its former standing; his respect for the dead; his "family pride," which to the unsympathetic outsider might have seemed grotesque; were proofs of loyalty that moved the colonel deeply. When he himself had been a child of five or six, his father had given him Peter as his own boy. Peter was really not many years older than the colonel, but prosperity had preserved the one, while hard luck had aged the other prematurely. Peter had taken care of him, and taught him to paddle in the shallow water of the creek and to avoid the suck-holes; had taught him simple woodcraft, how to fish, and how to hunt, first with bow and arrow, and later with a shotgun. Through the golden haze of memory the colonel's happy childhood came back to him with a sudden rush of emotion.

"Those were good times, Peter, when we were young," he sighed regretfully, "good times! I have seen none happier."

"Yas, suh! yas, suh! 'Deed dem wuz good ole times! Sho' dey wuz, suh, sho' dey wuz! 'Member dem co'n-stalk fiddles we use' ter make, an' dem elderberry-wood whistles?"

"Yes, Peter, and the robins we used to shoot and the rabbits we used to trap?"

"An' dem watermillions, suh—um-m-m, um-m-m-m!"

"*Y-e-s*," returned the colonel, with a shade of pensiveness. There had been two sides to the watermelon question. Peter and he had not always been able to find ripe watermelons, early in the season, and at times there had been painful consequences, the memory of which came back to the colonel with surprising ease. Nor had they always been careful about boundaries in those early days. There had been one occasion when an irate neighbour had complained, and Major French had thrashed Henry and Peter both—Peter because he was older, and knew better, and Henry because it was important that he should have impressed upon him, early in life, that of him to whom much is given, much will be required, and that what might be lightly regarded in Peter's case would be a serious offence in his future master's. The lesson had been well learned, for throughout the course of his life the colonel had never shirked responsibility, but had made the performance of duty his criterion of conduct. To him the line of least resistance had always seemed the refuge of the coward and the weakling. With the twenty years preceding his return to Clarendon, this story has nothing to do; but upon the quiet background of his business career he had lived an active

intellectual and emotional life, and had developed into one of those rare natures of whom it may be truly said that they are men, and that they count nothing of what is human foreign to themselves.

But the serenity of Peter's retrospect was unmarred by any passing cloud. Those who dwell in darkness find it easier to remember the bright places in their lives.

"Yas, suh, yas, suh, dem watermillions," he repeated with unction, "I kin tas'e 'em now! Dey wuz de be's watermillions dat evuh growed, suh—dey doan raise none lack 'em dese days no mo'. An' den dem chinquapin bushes down by de swamp! 'Member dem chinquapin bushes, whar we killt dat water moccasin dat day? He wuz 'bout ten foot long!"

"Yes, Peter, he was a whopper! Then there were the bullace vines, in the woods beyond the tanyard!"

"Sho' 'nuff, suh! an' de minnows we use' ter ketch in de creek, an' dem perch in de mill pon'?"

For years the colonel had belonged to a fishing club, which preserved an ice-cold stream in a Northern forest. For years the choicest fruits of all the earth had been served daily upon his table. Yet as he looked back to-day no shining trout that had ever risen to his fly had stirred his emotions like the diaphanous minnows, caught, with a crooked pin, in the crooked creek; no luscious fruit had ever matched in sweetness the sour grapes and bitter nuts gathered from the native woods—by him and Peter in their far-off youth.

"Yas, suh, yas, suh," Peter went on, "an' 'member dat time you an' young Mars Jim Wilson went huntin' and fishin' up de country tergether, an' got ti'ed er waitin' on yo'se'ves an' writ back fer me ter come up ter wait on yer and cook fer yer, an' ole Marster say he did n' dare ter let me go 'way off yander wid two keerliss boys lak you-all, wid guns an' boats fer fear I mought git shot, er drownded?"

"It looked, Peter, as though he valued you more than me! more than his own son!"

"Yas, suh, yas, suh! sho' he did, sho' he did! old Marse Philip wuz a monstus keerful man, an' *I* wuz winth somethin', suh, dem times; I wuz wuth five hundred dollahs any day in de yeah. But nobody would n' give five hundred cents fer me now, suh. Dey'd want pay fer takin' me, mos' lakly. Dey ain' none too much room fer a young nigger no mo', let 'lone a' ol' one."

"And what have you been doing all these years, Peter?" asked the colonel.

Peter's story was not a thrilling one; it was no tale of inordinate ambition, no Odyssey of a perilous search for the prizes of life, but the bald recital of a mere struggle for existence. Peter had stayed by his master until his master's death. Then he had worked for a railroad contractor, until exposure and overwork had laid him up with a fever. After his recovery, he had been employed for some years at cutting turpentine boxes in the pine woods, following the trail of the industry southward, until one day his axe had slipped and wounded him severely. When his wound

was healed he was told that he was too old and awkward for the turpentine, and that they needed younger and more active men.

"So w'en I got my laig kyo'ed up," said the old man, concluding his story, "I come back hyuh whar I wuz bo'n, suh, and whar my w'ite folks use' ter live, an' whar my frien's use' ter be. But my w'ite folks wuz all in de graveya'd, an' most er my frien's wuz dead er moved away, an' I fin's it kinder lonesome, suh. I goes out an' picks cotton in de fall, an' I does arrants an' little jobs roun' de house fer folks w'at 'll hire me; an' w'en I ain' got nothin' ter eat I kin gor oun' ter de ole house an' wo'k in de gyahden er chop some wood, an' git a meal er vittles f'om ole Mis' Nichols, who's be'n mighty good ter me, suh. She's de barbuh's wife, suh, w'at bought ouah ole house. Dey got mo' dan any yuther colored folks roun' hyuh, but dey he'ps de po', suh, dey he'ps de po'."

"Which speaks well for them, Peter. I'm glad that all the virtue has not yet gone out of the old house."

The old man's talk rambled on, like a sluggish stream, while the colonel's more active mind busied itself with the problem suggested by this unforeseen meeting. Peter and he had both gone out into the world, and they had both returned. He had come back rich and independent. What good had freedom done for Peter? In the colonel's childhood his father's butler, old Madison, had lived a life which, compared to that of Peter at the same age, was one of ease and luxury. How easy the conclusion that the slave's lot had been the more fortunate! But no, Peter had been

better free. There were plenty of poor white men, and no one had suggested slavery as an improvement of their condition. Had Peter remained a slave, then the colonel would have remained a master, which was only another form of slavery. The colonel had been emancipated by the same token that had made Peter free. Peter had returned home poor and broken, not because he had been free, but because nature first, and society next, in distributing their gifts, had been niggardly with old Peter. Had he been better equipped, or had a better chance, he might have made a better showing. The colonel had prospered because, having no Peters to work for him, he had been compelled to work for himself. He would set his own success against Peter's failure; and he would take off his hat to the memory of the immortal statesman, who in freeing one race had emancipated another and struck the shackles from a Nation's mind.

Four

While the colonel and old Peter were thus discussing reminiscences in which little Phil could have no share, the boy, with childish curiosity, had wandered off, down one of the shaded paths. When, a little later, the colonel looked around for him, he saw Phil seated on a rustic bench, in conversation with a lady. As the boy seemed entirely comfortable, and the lady not at all disturbed, the colonel did not interrupt them for a while. But when the lady at length rose, holding Phil by the hand, the colonel, fearing that the boy, who was a child of strong impulses, prone to sudden friendships, might be proving troublesome, left his seat on the flat-topped tomb of his Revolutionary ancestor and hastened to meet them.

"I trust my boy hasn't annoyed you," he said, lifting his hat.

"Not at all, sir," returned the lady, in a clear, sweet voice, some haunting tone of which found an answering vibration in the colonel's memory. "On the contrary, he has interested me very much, and in nothing more than in telling me his name. If this and my memory do not deceive me, *you* are Henry French!"

"Yes, and you are—you are Laura Treadwell! How glad I am to meet you! I was coming to call this afternoon."

"I'm glad to see you again. We have always remembered you, and knew that you had grown rich and great, and feared that you had forgotten the old town—and your old friends."

"Not very rich, nor very great, Laura—Miss Treadwell."

"Let it be Laura," she said with a faint colour mounting in her cheek, which had not yet lost its smoothness, as her eyes had not faded, nor her step lost its spring.

"And neither have I forgotten the old home nor the old friends—since I am here and knew you the moment I looked at you and heard your voice."

"And what a dear little boy!" exclaimed Miss Treadwell, looking down at Phil. "He is named Philip—after his grandfather, I reckon?"

"After his grandfather. We have been visiting his grave, and those of all the Frenches; and I found them haunted—by an old retainer, who had come hither, he said, to be with his friends."

"Old Peter! I see him, now and then, keeping the lot in order. There are few like him left, and there were never any too many. But how have you been these many years, and where is your wife? Did you bring her with you?"

"I buried her," returned the colonel, "a little over a year ago. She left me little Phil."

"He must be like her," replied the lady, "and yet he resembles you."

"He has her eyes and hair," said his father. "He is a good little boy and a lad of taste. See how he took to you at first sight! I can always trust Phil's instincts. He is a born gentleman."

"He came of a race of gentlemen," she said. "I'm glad it is not to die out. There are none too many left—in Clarendon. You are

going to like me, aren't you, Phil?" asked the lady.

"I like you already," replied Phil gallantly. "You are a very nice lady. What shall I call you?"

"Call her Miss Laura, Phil—it is the Southern fashion—a happy union of familiarity and respect. Already they come back to me, Laura—one breathes them with the air—the gentle Southern customs. With all the faults of the old system, Laura—it carried the seeds of decay within itself and was doomed to perish—a few of us, at least, had a good time. An aristocracy is quite endurable, for the aristocrat, and slavery tolerable, for the masters—and the Peters. When we were young, before the rude hand of war had shattered our illusions, we were very happy, Laura."

"Yes, we were very happy."

They were walking now, very slowly, toward the gate by which the colonel had entered, with little Phil between them, confiding a hand to each.

"And how is your mother?" asked the colonel. "She is living yet, I trust?"

"Yes, but ailing, as she has been for fifteen years—ever since my father died. It was his grave I came to visit."

"You had ever a loving heart, Laura," said the colonel, "given to duty and self-sacrifice. Are you still living in the old place?"

"The old place, only it is older, and shows it—like the rest of us."

She bit her lip at the words, which she meant in reference

to herself, but which she perceived, as soon as she had uttered them, might apply to him with equal force. Despising herself for the weakness which he might have interpreted as a bid for a compliment, she was glad that he seemed unconscious of the remark.

The colonel and Phil had entered the cemetery by a side gate and their exit led through the main entrance. Miss Laura pointed out, as they walked slowly along between the elms, the graves of many whom the colonel had known in his younger days. Their names, woven in the tapestry of his memory, needed in most cases but a touch to restore them. For while his intellectual life had ranged far and wide, his business career had run along a single channel, his circle of intimates had not been very large nor very variable, nor was his memory so overlaid that he could not push aside its later impressions in favour of those graven there so deeply in his youth.

Nearing the gate, they passed a small open space in which stood a simple marble shaft, erected to the memory of the Confederate Dead.

A wealth of fresh flowers lay at its base. The colonel took off his hat as he stood before it for a moment with bowed head. But for the mercy of God, he might have been one of those whose deaths as well as deeds were thus commemorated.

Beyond this memorial, impressive in its pure simplicity, and between it and the gate, in an obtrusively conspicuous spot stood a florid monument of granite, marble and bronze, of glaring

design and strangely out of keeping with the simple dignity and quiet restfulness of the surroundings; a monument so striking that the colonel paused involuntarily and read the inscription in bronze letters on the marble shaft above the granite base:

"'Sacred to the Memory of
Joshua Fetters and Elizabeth Fetters, his Wife.

"'Life's work well done,
Life's race well run,
Life's crown well won,
Then comes rest.'"

"A beautiful sentiment, if somewhat trite," said the colonel, "but an atrocious monument."

"Do you think so?" exclaimed the lady. "Most people think the monument fine, but smile at the sentiment."

"In matters of taste," returned the colonel, "the majority are always wrong. But why smile at the sentiment? Is it, for some reason, inappropriate to this particular case? Fetters—Fetters—the name seems familiar. Who was Fetters, Laura?"

"He was the speculator," she said, "who bought and sold negroes, and kept dogs to chase runaways; old Mr. Fetters—you must remember old Josh Fetters? When I was a child, my coloured mammy used him for a bogeyman for me, as for her own children."

"'Look out, honey,' she'd say, 'ef you ain' good, ole Mr. Fettuhs

'll ketch you.'"

Yes, he remembered now. Fetters had been a character in Clarendon—not an admirable character, scarcely a good character, almost a bad character; a necessary adjunct of an evil system, and, like other parasites, worse than the body on which he fed; doing the dirty work of slavery, and very naturally despised by those whose instrument he was, but finding consolation by taking it out of the Negroes in the course of his business. The colonel would have expected Fetters to lie in an unmarked grave in his own back lot, or in the potter's field. Had he so far escaped the ruin of the institution on which he lived, as to leave an estate sufficient to satisfy his heirs and also pay for this expensive but vulgar monument?

"The memorial was erected, as you see from the rest of the inscription, 'by his beloved and affectionate son.' That either loved the other no one suspected, for Bill was harshly treated, and ran away from home at fifteen. He came back after the war, with money, which he lent out at high rates of interest; everything he touched turned to gold; he has grown rich, and is a great man in the State. He was a large contributor to the soldiers' monument."

"But did not choose the design; let us be thankful for that. It might have been like his father's. Bill Fetters rich and great," he mused, "who would have dreamed it? I kicked him once, all the way down Main Street from the schoolhouse to the bank—and dodged his angry mother for a whole month afterward!"

"No one," suggested Miss Laura, "would venture to cross him

now. Too many owe him money."

"He went to school at the academy," the colonel went on, unwinding the thread of his memory, "and the rest of the boys looked down on him and made his life miserable. Well, Laura, in Fetters you see one thing that resulted from the war—the poor white boy was given a chance to grow; and if the product is not as yet altogether admirable, taste and culture may come with another generation."

"It is to be hoped they may," said Miss Laura, "and character as well. Mr. Fetters has a son who has gone from college to college, and will graduate from Harvard this summer. They say he is very wild and spends ten thousand dollars a year. I do not see how it can be possible!"

The colonel smiled at her simplicity.

"I have been," he said, "at a college football game, where the gate receipts were fifty thousand dollars, and half a million was said to have changed hands in bets on the result. It is easy to waste money."

"It is a sin," she said, "that some should be made poor, that others may have it to waste."

There was a touch of bitterness in her tone, the instinctive resentment (the colonel thought) of the born aristocrat toward the upstart who had pushed his way above those no longer strong enough to resist. It did not occur to him that her feeling might rest upon any personal ground. It was inevitable that, with the incubus of slavery removed, society should readjust itself in due

time upon a democratic basis, and that poor white men, first, and black men next, should reach a level representing the true measure of their talents and their ambition. But it was perhaps equally inevitable that for a generation or two those who had suffered most from the readjustment, should chafe under its seeming injustice.

The colonel was himself a gentleman, and the descendant of a long line of gentlemen. But he had lived too many years among those who judged the tree by its fruit, to think that blood alone entitled him to any special privileges. The consciousness of honourable ancestry might make one clean of life, gentle of manner, and just in one's dealings. In so far as it did this it was something to be cherished, but scarcely to be boasted of, for democracy is impatient of any excellence not born of personal effort, of any pride save that of achievement. He was glad that Fetters had got on in the world. It justified a fine faith in humanity, that wealth and power should have been attained by the poor white lad, over whom, with a boy's unconscious brutality, he had tyrannised in his childhood. He could have wished for Bill a better taste in monuments, and better luck in sons, if rumour was correct about Fetters's boy. But, these, perhaps, were points where blood *did* tell. There was something in blood, after all, Nature might make a great man from any sort of material: hence the virtue of democracy, for the world needs great men, and suffers from their lack, and welcomes them from any source. But fine types were a matter of breeding and

were perhaps worth the trouble of preserving, if their existence were compatible with the larger good. He wondered if Bill ever recalled that progress down Main Street in which he had played so conspicuous a part, or still bore any resentment toward the other participants?

"Could your mother see me," he asked, as they reached the gate, "if I went by the house?"

"She would be glad to see you. Mother lives in the past, and you would come to her as part of it. She often speaks of you. It is only a short distance. You have not forgotten the way?"

They turned to the right, in a direction opposite to that from which the colonel had reached the cemetery. After a few minutes' walk, in the course of which they crossed another bridge over the same winding creek, they mounted the slope beyond, opened a gate, climbed a short flight of stone steps and found themselves in an enchanted garden, where lilac bush and jessamine vine reared their heads high, tulip and daffodil pushed their way upward, but were all dominated by the intenser fragrance of the violets.

Old Peter had followed the party at a respectful distance, but, seeing himself forgotten, he walked past the gate, after they had entered it, and went, somewhat disconsolately, on his way. He had stopped, and was looking back toward the house—Clarendon was a great place for looking back, perhaps because there was little in the town to which to look forward—when a white man, wearing a tinned badge upon his coat, came up, took Peter by the arm and led him away, despite some feeble protests

on the old man's part.

Five

At the end of the garden stood a frame house with a wide, columned porch. It had once been white, and the windows closed with blinds that still retained a faded tint of green. Upon the porch, in a comfortable arm chair, sat an old lady, wearing a white cap, under which her white hair showed at the sides, and holding her hands, upon which she wore black silk mits, crossed upon her lap. On the top step, at opposite ends, sat two young people—one of them a rosy-cheeked girl, in the bloom of early youth, with a head of rebellious brown hair. She had been reading a book held open in her hand. The other was a long-legged, lean, shy young man, of apparently twenty-three or twenty-four, with black hair and eyes and a swarthy complexion. From the jack-knife beside him, and the shavings scattered around, it was clear that he had been whittling out the piece of pine that he was adjusting, with some nicety, to a wooden model of some mechanical contrivance which stood upon the floor beside him. They were a strikingly handsome couple, of ideally contrasting types.

"Mother," said Miss Treadwell, "this is Henry French—Colonel French—who has come back from the North to visit his old home and the graves of his ancestors. I found him in the cemetery; and this is his dear little boy, Philip—named after his grandfather."

The old lady gave the colonel a slender white hand, thin almost to transparency.

"Henry," she said, in a silvery thread of voice, "I am glad to see you. You must excuse my not rising—I can't walk without help. You are like your father, and even more like your grandfather, and your little boy takes after the family." She drew Phil toward her and kissed him.

Phil accepted this attention amiably. Meantime the young people had risen.

"This," said Miss Treadwell, laying her hand affectionately on the girl's arm, "is my niece Graciella—my brother Tom's child. Tom is dead, you know, these eight years and more, and so is Graciella's mother, and she has lived with us."

Graciella gave the colonel her hand with engaging frankness. "I'm sure we're awfully glad to see anybody from the North," she said. "Are you familiar with New York?"

"I left there only day before yesterday," replied the colonel.

"And this," said Miss Treadwell, introducing the young man, who, when he unfolded his long legs, rose to a rather imposing height, "this is Mr. Ben Dudley."

"The son of Malcolm Dudley, of Mink Run, I suppose? I'm glad to meet you," said the colonel, giving the young man's hand a cordial grasp.

"His nephew, sir," returned young Dudley. "My uncle never married."

"Oh, indeed? I did not know; but he is alive, I trust, and well?"

"Alive, sir, but very much broken. He has not been himself for years."

"You find things sadly changed, Henry," said Mrs. Treadwell. "They have never been the same since the surrender. Our people are poor now, right poor, most of them, though we ourselves were fortunate enough to have something left."

"We have enough left for supper, mother," interposed Miss Laura quickly, "to which we are going to ask Colonel French to stay."

"I suppose that in New York every one has dinner at six, and supper after the theatre or the concert?" said Graciella, inquiringly.

"The fortunate few," returned the colonel, smiling into her eager face, "who can afford a seat at the opera, and to pay for and digest two meals, all in the same evening."

"And now, colonel," said Miss Treadwell, "I'm going to see about the supper. Mother will talk to you while I am gone."

"I must be going," said young Dudley.

"Won't you stay to supper, Ben?" asked Miss Laura.

"No, Miss Laura; I'd like to, but uncle wasn't well to-day and I must stop by the drug store and get some medicine for him. Dr. Price gave me a prescription on my way in. Good-bye, sir," he added, addressing the colonel. "Will you be in town long?"

"I really haven't decided. A day or two, perhaps a week. I am not bound, at present, by any business ties—am foot-loose, as we used to say when I was young. I shall follow my inclinations."

"Then I hope, sir, that you'll feel inclined to pay us a long visit and that I shall see you many times."

As Ben Dudley, after this courteous wish, stepped down from the piazza, Graciella rose and walked with him along the garden path. She was tall as most women, but only reached his shoulder.

"Say, Graciella," he asked, "won't you give me an answer."

"I'm thinking about it, Ben. If you could take me away from this dead old town, with its lazy white people and its trifling niggers, to a place where there's music and art, and life and society—where there's something going on all the time, I'd *like* to marry you. But if I did so now, you'd take me out to your rickety old house, with your daffy old uncle and his dumb old housekeeper, and I should lose my own mind in a week or ten days. When you can promise to take me to New York, I'll promise to marry you, Ben. I want to travel, and to see things, to visit the art galleries and libraries, to hear Patti, and to look at the millionaires promenading on Fifth Avenue—and I'll marry the man who'll take me there!"

"Uncle Malcolm can't live forever, Graciella—though I wouldn't wish his span shortened by a single day—and I'll get the plantation. And then, you know," he added, hesitating, "we may —we may find the money."

Graciella shook her head compassionately. "No, Ben, you'll never find the money. There isn't any; it's all imagination —moonshine. The war unsettled your uncle's brain, and he dreamed the money."

"It's as true as I'm standing here, Graciella," replied Ben, earnestly, "that there's money—gold—somewhere about the house. Uncle couldn't imagine paper and ink, and I've seen the letter from my uncle's uncle Ralph—I'll get it and bring it to you. Some day the money will turn up, and then may be I'll be able to take you away. Meantime some one must look after uncle and the place; there's no one else but me to do it. Things must grow better some time—they always do, you know."

"They couldn't be much worse," returned Graciella, discontentedly.

"Oh, they'll be better—they're bound to be! They'll just have to be. And you'll wait for me, won't you, Graciella?"

"Oh, I suppose I'll have to. You're around here so much that every one else is scared away, and there isn't much choice at the best; all the young men worth having are gone away already. But you know my ultimatum—I must get to New York. If you are ready before any one else speaks, you may take me there."

"You're hard on a poor devil, Graciella. I don't believe you care a bit for me, or you wouldn't talk like that. Don't you suppose I have any feelings, even if I ain't much account? Ain't I worth as much as a trip up North?"

"Why should I waste my time with you, if I didn't care for you?" returned Graciella, begging the question. "Here's a rose, in token of my love."

She plucked the flower and thrust it into his hand.

"It's full of thorns, like your love," he said ruefully, as he

picked the sharp points out of his fingers.

"'Faithful are the wounds of a friend,'" returned the girl. "See Psalms, xxvii: 6."

"Take care of my cotton press, Graciella; I'll come in to-morrow evening and work on it some more. I'll bring some cotton along to try it with."

"You'll probably find some excuse—you always do."

"Don't you want me to come?" he asked with a trace of resentment. "I can stay away, if you don't."

"Oh, you come so often that I—I suppose I'd miss you, if you didn't! One must have some company, and half a loaf is better than no bread."

He went on down the hill, turning at the corner for a lingering backward look at his tyrant. Graciella, bending her head over the wall, followed his movements with a swift tenderness in her sparkling brown eyes.

"I love him better than anything on earth," she sighed, "but it would never do to tell him so. He'd get so conceited that I couldn't manage him any longer, and so lazy that he'd never exert himself. I must get away from this town before I'm old and gray —I'll be seventeen next week, and an old maid in next to no time —and Ben must take me away. But I must be his inspiration; he'd never do it by himself. I'll go now and talk to that dear old Colonel French about the North; I can learn a great deal from him. And he doesn't look so old either," she mused, as she went back up the walk to where the colonel sat on the piazza talking

to the other ladies.

Six

The colonel spent a delightful evening in the company of his friends. The supper was typically Southern, and the cook evidently a good one. There was smothered chicken, light biscuit, fresh eggs, poundcake and tea. The tablecloth and napkins were of fine linen. That they were soft and smooth the colonel noticed, but he did not observe closely enough to see that they had been carefully darned in many places. The silver spoons were of fine, old-fashioned patterns, worn very thin—so thin that even the colonel was struck by their fragility. How charming, he thought, to prefer the simple dignity of the past to the vulgar ostentation of a more modern time. He had once dined off a golden dinner service, at the table of a multi-millionaire, and had not enjoyed the meal half so much. The dining-room looked out upon the garden and the perfume of lilac and violet stole in through the open windows. A soft-footed, shapely, well-trained negro maid, in white cap and apron, waited deftly upon the table; a woman of serious countenance—so serious that the colonel wondered if she were a present-day type of her race, and if the responsibilities of freedom had robbed her people of their traditional light-heartedness and gaiety.

After supper they sat out upon the piazza. The lights within were turned down low, so that the moths and other insects might not be attracted. Sweet odours from the garden filled the

air. Through the elms the stars, brighter than in more northern latitudes, looked out from a sky of darker blue; so bright were they that the colonel, looking around for the moon, was surprised to find that luminary invisible. On the green background of the foliage the fireflies glowed and flickered. There was no strident steam whistle from factory or train to assault the ear, no rumble of passing cabs or street cars. Far away, in some distant part of the straggling town, a sweet-toned bell sounded the hour of an evening church service.

"To see you is a breath from the past, Henry," said Mrs. Treadwell. "You are a fine, strong man now, but I can see you as you were, the day you went away to the war, in your new gray uniform, on your fine gray horse, at the head of your company. You were going to take Peter with you, but he had got his feet poisoned with poison ivy, and couldn't walk, and your father gave you another boy, and Peter cried like a baby at being left behind. I can remember how proud you were, and how proud your father was, when he gave you his sword—your grandfather's sword, and told you never to draw it or sheath it, except in honour; and how, when you were gone, the old gentleman shut himself up for two whole days and would speak to no one. He was glad and sorry—glad to send you to fight for your country, and sorry to see you go—for you were his only boy."

The colonel thrilled with love and regret. His father had loved him, he knew very well, and he had not visited his tomb for twenty-five years. How far away it seemed too, the time when he

had thought of the Confederacy as his country! And the sword, his grandfather's sword, had been for years stored away in a dark closet. His father had kept it displayed upon the drawing-room wall, over the table on which the family Bible had rested.

Mrs. Treadwell was silent for a moment.

"Times have changed since then, Henry. We have lost a great deal, although we still have enough—yes, we have plenty to live upon, and to hold up our heads among the best."

Miss Laura and Graciella, behind the colonel's back, exchanged meaning glances. How well they knew how little they had to live upon!

"That is quite evident," said the colonel, glancing through the window at the tasteful interior, "and I am glad to see that you have fared so well. My father lost everything."

"We were more fortunate," said Mrs. Treadwell. "We were obliged to let Belleview go when Major Treadwell died—there were debts to be paid, and we were robbed as well—but we have several rentable properties in town, and an estate in the country which brings us in an income. But things are not quite what they used to be!"

Mrs. Treadwell sighed, and nodded. Miss Laura sat in silence—a pensive silence. She, too, remembered the time gone by, but unlike her mother's life, her own had only begun as the good times were ending. Her mother, in her youth, had seen something of the world. The daughter of a wealthy planter, she had spent her summers at Saratoga, had visited New York and Philadelphia

and New Orleans, and had taken a voyage to Europe. Graciella was young and beautiful. Her prince might come, might be here even now, if this grand gentleman should chance to throw the handkerchief. But she, Laura, had passed her youth in a transition period; the pleasures neither of memory nor of hope had been hers—except such memories as came of duty well performed, and such hopes as had no root in anything earthly or corruptible.

Graciella was not in a reflective mood, and took up the burden of the conversation where her grandmother had dropped it. Her thoughts were not of the past, but of the future. She asked many eager questions of New York. Was it true that ladies at the Waldorf-Astoria always went to dinner in low-cut bodices with short sleeves, and was evening dress always required at the theatre? Did the old Knickerbocker families recognise the Vanderbilts? Were the Rockefellers anything at all socially? Did he know Ward McAllister, at that period the Beau Brummel of the metropolitan smart set? Was Fifth Avenue losing its pre-eminence? On what days of the week was the Art Museum free to the public? What was the fare to New York, and the best quarter of the city in which to inquire for a quiet, select boarding house where a Southern lady of refinement and good family might stay at a reasonable price, and meet some nice people? And would he recommend stenography or magazine work, and which did he consider preferable, as a career which such a young lady might follow without injury to her social standing?

The colonel, with some amusement, answered these artless

inquiries as best he could; they came as a refreshing foil to the sweet but melancholy memories of the past. They were interesting, too, from this very pretty but very ignorant little girl in this backward little Southern town. She was a flash of sunlight through a soft gray cloud; a vigorous shoot from an old moss-covered stump—she was life, young life, the vital principle, breaking through the cumbering envelope, and asserting its right to reach the sun.

After a while a couple of very young ladies, friends of Graciella, dropped in. They were introduced to the colonel, who found that he had known their fathers, or their mothers, or their grandfathers, or their grandmothers, and that many of them were more or less distantly related. A little later a couple of young men, friends of Graciella's friends—also very young, and very self-conscious—made their appearance, and were duly introduced, in person and by pedigree. The conversation languished for a moment, and then one of the young ladies said something about music, and one of the young men remarked that he had brought over a new song. Graciella begged the colonel to excuse them, and led the way to the parlour, followed by her young friends.

Mrs. Treadwell had fallen asleep, and was leaning comfortably back in her armchair. Miss Laura excused herself, brought a veil, and laid it softly across her mother's face.

"The night air is not damp," she said, "and it is pleasanter for her here than in the house. She won't mind the music; she is accustomed to it."

Graciella went to the piano and with great boldness of touch struck the bizarre opening chords and then launched into the grotesque words of the latest New York "coon song," one of the first and worst of its kind, and the other young people joined in the chorus.

It was the first discordant note. At home, the colonel subscribed to the opera, and enjoyed the music. A plantation song of the olden time, as he remembered it, borne upon the evening air, when sung by the tired slaves at the end of their day of toil, would have been pleasing, with its simple melody, its plaintive minor strains, its notes of vague longing; but to the colonel's senses there was to-night no music in this hackneyed popular favourite. In a metropolitan music hall, gaudily bedecked and brilliantly lighted, it would have been tolerable from the lips of a black-face comedian. But in this quiet place, upon this quiet night, and in the colonel's mood, it seemed like profanation. The song of the coloured girl, who had dreamt that she dwelt in marble halls, and the rest, had been less incongruous; it had at least breathed aspiration.

Mrs. Treadwell was still dozing in her armchair. The colonel, beckoning Miss Laura to follow him, moved to the farther end of the piazza, where they might not hear the singers and the song.

"It is delightful here, Laura. I seem to have renewed my youth. I yield myself a willing victim to the charm of the old place, the old ways, the old friends."

"You see our best side, Henry. Night has a kindly hand,

that covers our defects, and the starlight throws a glamour over everything. You see us through a haze of tender memories. When you have been here a week, the town will seem dull, and narrow, and sluggish. You will find us ignorant and backward, worshipping our old idols, and setting up no new ones; our young men leaving us, and none coming in to take their place. Had you, and men like you, remained with us, we might have hoped for better things."

"And perhaps not, Laura. Environment controls the making of men. Some rise above it, the majority do not. We might have followed in the well-worn rut. But let us not spoil this delightful evening by speaking of anything sad or gloomy. This is your daily life; to me it is like a scene from a play, over which one sighs to see the curtain fall—all enchantment, all light, all happiness."

But even while he spoke of light, a shadow loomed up beside them. The coloured woman who had waited at the table came around the house from the back yard and stood by the piazza railing.

"Miss Laura!" she called, softly and appealingly. "Kin you come hyuh a minute?"

"What is it, Catherine?"

"Kin I speak just a word to you, ma'am? It's somethin' partic'lar—mighty partic'lar, ma'am."

"Excuse me a minute, Henry," said Miss Laura, rising with evident reluctance.

She stepped down from the piazza, and walked beside the

woman down one of the garden paths. The colonel, as he sat there smoking—with Miss Laura's permission he had lighted a cigar—could see the light stuff of the lady's gown against the green background, though she was walking in the shadow of the elms. From the murmur which came to him, he gathered that the black woman was pleading earnestly, passionately, and he could hear Miss Laura's regretful voice, as she closed the interview:

"I am sorry, Catherine, but it is simply impossible. I would if I could, but I cannot."

The woman came back first, and as she passed by an open window, the light fell upon her face, which showed signs of deep distress, hardening already into resignation or despair. She was probably in trouble of some sort, and her mistress had not been able, doubtless for some good reason, to help her out. This suspicion was borne out by the fact that when Miss Laura came back to him, she too seemed troubled. But since she did not speak of the matter, the colonel gave no sign of his own thoughts.

"You have said nothing of yourself, Laura," he said, wishing to divert her mind from anything unpleasant. "Tell me something of your own life—it could only be a cheerful theme, for you have means and leisure, and a perfect environment. Tell me of your occupations, your hopes, your aspirations."

"There is little enough to tell, Henry," she returned, with a sudden courage, "but that little shall be the truth. You will find it out, if you stay long in town, and I would rather you learned it from our lips than from others less friendly. My mother is—

my mother—a dear, sweet woman to whom I have devoted my life! But we are not well off, Henry. Our parlour carpet has been down for twenty-five years; surely you must have recognised the pattern! The house has not been painted for the same length of time; it is of heart pine, and we train the flowers and vines to cover it as much as may be, and there are many others like it, so it is not conspicuous. Our rentable property is three ramshackle cabins on the alley at the rear of the lot, for which we get four dollars a month each, when we can collect it. Our country estate is a few acres of poor land, which we rent on shares, and from which we get a few bushels of corn, an occasional load of firewood, and a few barrels of potatoes. As for my own life, I husband our small resources; I keep the house, and wait on mother, as I have done since she became helpless, ten years ago. I look after Graciella. I teach in the Sunday School, and I give to those less fortunate such help as the poor can give the poor."

"How did you come to lose Belleview?" asked the colonel, after a pause. "I had understood Major Treadwell to be one of the few people around here who weathered the storm of war and emerged financially sound."

"He did; and he remained so—until he met Mr. Fetters, who had made money out of the war while all the rest were losing. Father despised the slavetrader's son, but admired his ability to get along. Fetters made his acquaintance, flattered him, told him glowing stories of wealth to be made by speculating in cotton and turpentine. Father was not a business man, but he

listened. Fetters lent him money, and father lent Fetters money, and they had transactions back and forth, and jointly. Father lost and gained and we had no inkling that he had suffered greatly, until, at his sudden death, Fetters foreclosed a mortgage he held upon Belleview. Mother has always believed there was something wrong about the transaction, and that father was not indebted to Fetters in any such sum as Fetters claimed. But we could find no papers and we had no proof, and Fetters took the plantation for his debt. He changed its name to Sycamore; he wanted a post-office there, and there were too many Belleviews."

"Does he own it still?"

"Yes, and runs it—with convict labour! The thought makes me shudder! We were rich when he was poor; we are poor and he is rich. But we trust in God, who has never deserted the widow and the fatherless. By His mercy we have lived and, as mother says, held up our heads, not in pride or haughtiness, but in self-respect, for we cannot forget what we were."

"Nor what you are, Laura, for you are wonderful," said the colonel, not unwilling to lighten a situation that bordered on intensity. "You should have married and had children. The South needs such mothers as you would have made. Unless the men of Clarendon have lost their discernment, unless chivalry has vanished and the fire died out of the Southern blood, it has not been for lack of opportunity that your name remains unchanged."

Miss Laura's cheek flushed unseen in the shadow of the porch.

"Ah, Henry, that would be telling! But to marry me, one must

have married the family, for I could not have left them—they have had only me. I have not been unhappy. I do not know that I would have had my life different."

Graciella and her friends had finished their song, the piano had ceased to sound, and the visitors were taking their leave. Graciella went with them to the gate, where they stood laughing and talking. The colonel looked at his watch by the light of the open door.

"It is not late," he said. "If my memory is true, you too played the piano when you—when I was young."

"It is the same piano, Henry, and, like our life here, somewhat thin and weak of tone. But if you think it would give you pleasure, I will play—as well as I know how."

She readjusted the veil, which had slipped from her mother's face, and they went into the parlour. From a pile of time-stained music she selected a sheet and seated herself at the piano. The colonel stood at her elbow. She had a pretty back, he thought, and a still youthful turn of the head, and still plentiful, glossy brown hair. Her hands were white, slender and well kept, though he saw on the side of the forefinger of her left hand the telltale marks of the needle.

The piece was an arrangement of the well-known air from the opera of *Maritana*:

> "Scenes that are brightest,
> May charm awhile,

Hearts which are lightest
And eyes that smile.
Yet o'er them above us,
Though nature beam,
With none to love us,
How sad they seem!"

Under her sympathetic touch a gentle stream of melody flowed from the old-time piano, scarcely stronger toned in its decrepitude, than the spinet of a former century. A few moments before, under Graciella's vigorous hands, it had seemed to protest at the dissonances it had been compelled to emit; now it seemed to breathe the notes of the old opera with an almost human love and tenderness. It, too, mused the colonel, had lived and loved and was recalling the memories of a brighter past.

The music died into silence. Mrs. Treadwell was awake.

"Laura!" she called.

Miss Treadwell went to the door.

"I must have been nodding for a minute. I hope Colonel French did not observe it—it would scarcely seem polite. He hasn't gone yet?"

"No, mother, he is in the parlour."

"I must be going," said the colonel, who came to the door. "I had almost forgotten Phil, and it is long past his bedtime."

Miss Laura went to wake up Phil, who had fallen asleep after supper. He was still rubbing his eyes when the lady led him out.

"Wake up, Phil," said the colonel. "It's time to be going. Tell

the ladies good night."

Graciella came running up the walk.

"Why, Colonel French," she cried, "you are not going already? I made the others leave early so that I might talk to you."

"My dear young lady," smiled the colonel, "I have already risen to go, and if I stayed longer I might wear out my welcome, and Phil would surely go to sleep again. But I will come another time—I shall stay in town several days."

"Yes, *do* come, if you *must* go," rejoined Graciella with emphasis. "I want to hear more about the North, and about New York society and—oh, everything! Good night, Philip. *Good* night, Colonel French."

"Beware of the steps, Henry," said Miss Laura, "the bottom stone is loose."

They heard his footsteps in the quiet street, and Phil's light patter beside him.

"He's a lovely man, isn't he, Aunt Laura?" said Graciella.

"He is a gentleman," replied her aunt, with a pensive look at her young niece.

"Of the old school," piped Mrs. Treadwell.

"And Philip is a sweet child," said Miss Laura.

"A chip of the old block," added Mrs. Treadwell. "I remember–"

"Yes, mother, you can tell me when I've shut up the house," interrupted Miss Laura. "Put out the lamps, Graciella—there's not much oil—and when you go to bed hang up your gown

carefully, for it takes me nearly half an hour to iron it."

"And you are right good to do it! Good night, dear Aunt Laura! Good night, grandma!"

Mr. French had left the hotel at noon that day as free as air, and he slept well that night, with no sense of the forces that were to constrain his life. And yet the events of the day had started the growth of a dozen tendrils, which were destined to grow, and reach out, and seize and hold him with ties that do not break.

Seven

The constable who had arrested old Peter led his prisoner away through alleys and quiet streets—though for that matter all the streets of Clarendon were quiet in midafternoon—to a guardhouse or calaboose, constructed of crumbling red brick, with a rusty, barred iron door secured by a heavy padlock. As they approached this structure, which was sufficiently forbidding in appearance to depress the most lighthearted, the strumming of a banjo became audible, accompanying a mellow Negro voice which was singing, to a very ragged ragtime air, words of which the burden was something like this:

> "W'at's de use er my wo'kin' so hahd?
> I got a' 'oman in de white man's yahd.
> W'en she cook chicken, she save me a wing;
> W'en dey 'low I'm wo'kin', I ain' doin' a thing!"

The grating of the key in the rusty lock interrupted the song. The constable thrust his prisoner into the dimly lighted interior, and locked the door.

"Keep over to the right," he said curtly, "that's the niggers' side."

"But, Mistah Haines," asked Peter, excitedly, "is I got to stay here all night? I ain' done nuthin'."

"No, that's the trouble; you ain't done nuthin' fer a month, but loaf aroun'. You ain't got no visible means of suppo't, so you're took up for vagrancy."

"But I does wo'k we'n I kin git any wo'k ter do," the old man expostulated. "An' ef I kin jus' git wo'd ter de right w'ite folks, I'll be outer here in half a' hour; dey'll go my bail."

"They can't go yo' bail to-night, fer the squire's gone home. I'll bring you some bread and meat, an' some whiskey if you want it, and you'll be tried to-morrow mornin'."

Old Peter still protested.

"You niggers are always kickin'," said the constable, who was not without a certain grim sense of humour, and not above talking to a Negro when there were no white folks around to talk to, or to listen. "I never see people so hard to satisfy. You ain' got no home, an' here I've give' you a place to sleep, an' you're kickin'. You doan know from one day to another where you'll git yo' meals, an' I offer you bread and meat and whiskey—an' you're kickin'! You say you can't git nothin' to do, an' yit with the prospect of a reg'lar job befo' you to-morrer—you're kickin'! I never see the beat of it in all my bo'n days."

When the constable, chuckling at his own humour, left the guardhouse, he found his way to a nearby barroom, kept by one Clay Jackson, a place with an evil reputation as the resort of white men of a low class. Most crimes of violence in the town could be traced to its influence, and more than one had been committed within its walls.

"Has Mr. Turner been in here?" demanded Haines of the man in charge.

The bartender, with a backward movement of his thumb, indicated a door opening into a room at the rear. Here the constable found his man—a burly, bearded giant, with a red face, a cunning eye and an overbearing manner. He had a bottle and a glass before him, and was unsociably drinking alone.

"Howdy, Haines," said Turner, "How's things? How many have you got this time?"

"I've got three rounded up, Mr. Turner, an' I'll take up another befo' night. That'll make fo'—fifty dollars fer me, an' the res' fer the squire."

"That's good," rejoined Turner. "Have a glass of liquor. How much do you s'pose the Squire'll fine Bud?"

"Well," replied Haines, drinking down the glass of whiskey at a gulp, "I reckon about twenty-five dollars."

"You can make it fifty just as easy," said Turner. "Niggers are all just a passell o' black fools. Bud would 'a' b'en out now, if it hadn't be'n for me. I bought him fer six months. I kept close watch of him for the first five, and then along to'ds the middle er the las' month I let on I'd got keerliss, an' he run away. Course I put the dawgs on 'im, an' followed 'im here, where his woman is, an' got you after 'im, and now he's good for six months more."

"The woman is a likely gal an' a good cook," said Haines. "*She'd* be wuth a good 'eal to you out at the stockade."

"That's a shore fact," replied the other, "an' I need another

good woman to help aroun'. If we'd 'a' thought about it, an' give' her a chance to hide Bud and feed him befo' you took 'im up, we could 'a' filed a charge ag'inst her for harborin' 'im."

"Well, I kin do it nex' time, fer he'll run away ag'in—they always do. Bud's got a vile temper."

"Yes, but he's a good field-hand, and I'll keep his temper down. Have somethin' mo'?"

"I've got to go back now and feed the pris'ners," said Haines, rising after he had taken another drink; "an' I'll stir Bud up so he'll raise h—ll, an' to-morrow morning I'll make another charge against him that'll fetch his fine up to fifty and costs."

"Which will give 'im to me till the cotton crop is picked, and several months more to work on the Jackson Swamp ditch if Fetters gits the contract. You stand by us here, Haines, an' help me git all the han's I can out o' this county, and I'll give you a job at Sycamo' when yo'r time's up here as constable. Go on and feed the niggers, an' stir up Bud, and I'll be on hand in the mornin' when court opens."

When the lesser of these precious worthies left his superior to his cups, he stopped in the barroom and bought a pint of rotgut whiskey—a cheap brand of rectified spirits coloured and flavoured to resemble the real article, to which it bore about the relation of vitriol to lye. He then went into a cheap eating house, conducted by a Negro for people of his own kind, where he procured some slices of fried bacon, and some soggy corn bread, and with these various purchases, wrapped in a piece of

brown paper, he betook himself to the guardhouse. He unlocked the door, closed it behind him, and called Peter. The old man came forward.

"Here, Peter," said Haines, "take what you want of this, and give some to them other fellows, and if there's anything left after you've got what you want, throw it to that sulky black hound over yonder in the corner."

He nodded toward a young Negro in the rear of the room, the Bud Johnson who had been the subject of the conversation with Turner. Johnson replied with a curse. The constable advanced menacingly, his hand moving toward his pocket. Quick as a flash the Negro threw himself upon him. The other prisoners, from instinct, or prudence, or hope of reward, caught him, pulled him away and held him off until Haines, pale with rage, rose to his feet and began kicking his assailant vigorously. With the aid of well-directed blows of his fists he forced the Negro down, who, unable to regain his feet, finally, whether from fear or exhaustion, lay inert, until the constable, having worked off his worst anger, and not deeming it to his advantage seriously to disable the prisoner, in whom he had a pecuniary interest, desisted from further punishment.

"I might send you to the penitentiary for this," he said, panting for breath, "but I'll send you to h—ll instead. You'll be sold back to Mr. Fetters for a year or two tomorrow, and in three months I'll be down at Sycamore as an overseer, and then I'll learn you to strike a white man, you–"

The remainder of the objurgation need not be told, but there was no doubt, from the expression on Haines's face, that he meant what he said, and that he would take pleasure in repaying, in overflowing measure, any arrears of revenge against the offending prisoner which he might consider his due. He had stirred Bud up very successfully—much more so, indeed, than he had really intended. He had meant to procure evidence against Bud, but had hardly thought to carry it away in the shape of a black eye and a swollen nose.

Eight

When the colonel set out next morning for a walk down the main street, he had just breakfasted on boiled brook trout, fresh laid eggs, hot muffins and coffee, and was feeling at peace with all mankind. He was alone, having left Phil in charge of the hotel housekeeper. He had gone only a short distance when he reached a door around which several men were lounging, and from which came the sound of voices and loud laughter. Stopping, he looked with some curiosity into the door, over which there was a faded sign to indicate that it was the office of a Justice of the Peace —a pleasing collocation of words, to those who could divorce it from any technical significance—Justice, Peace—the seed and the flower of civilisation.

An unwashed, dingy-faced young negro, clothed in rags unspeakably vile, which scarcely concealed his nakedness, was standing in the midst of a group of white men, toward whom he threw now and then a shallow and shifty glance. The air was heavy with the odour of stale tobacco, and the floor dotted with discarded portions of the weed. A white man stood beside a desk and was addressing the audience:

"Now, gentlemen, here's Lot Number Three, a likely young nigger who answers to the name of Sam Brown. Not much to look at, but will make a good field hand, if looked after right and kept away from liquor; used to workin', when in the chain gang,

where he's been, off and on, since he was ten years old. Amount of fine an' costs thirty-seven dollars an' a half. A musical nigger, too, who plays the banjo, an' sings jus' like a—like a blackbird. What am I bid for this prime lot?"

The negro threw a dull glance around the crowd with an air of detachment which seemed to say that he was not at all interested in the proceedings. The colonel viewed the scene with something more than curious interest. The fellow looked like an habitual criminal, or at least like a confirmed loafer. This must be one of the idle and worthless blacks with so many of whom the South was afflicted. This was doubtless the method provided by law for dealing with them.

"One year," answered a voice.

"Nine months," said a second.

"Six months," came a third bid, from a tall man with a buggy whip under his arm.

"Are you all through, gentlemen? Six months' labour for thirty-seven fifty is mighty cheap, and you know the law allows you to keep the labourer up to the mark. Are you all done? Sold to Mr. Turner, for Mr. Fetters, for six months."

The prisoner's dull face showed some signs of apprehension when the name of his purchaser was pronounced, and he shambled away uneasily under the constable's vigilant eye.

"The case of the State against Bud Johnson is next in order. Bring in the prisoner."

The constable brought in the prisoner, handcuffed, and placed

him in front of the Justice's desk, where he remained standing. He was a short, powerfully built negro, seemingly of pure blood, with a well-rounded head, not unduly low in the brow and quite broad between the ears. Under different circumstances his countenance might have been pleasing; at present it was set in an expression of angry defiance. He had walked with a slight limp, there were several contusions upon his face; and upon entering the room he had thrown a defiant glance around him, which had not quailed even before the stern eye of the tall man, Turner, who, as the agent of the absent Fetters, had bid on Sam Brown. His face then hardened into the blank expression of one who stands in a hostile presence.

"Bud Johnson," said the justice, "you are charged with escaping from the service into which you were sold to pay the fine and costs on a charge of vagrancy. What do you plead—guilty or not guilty?"

The prisoner maintained a sullen silence.

"I'll enter a plea of not guilty. The record of this court shows that you were convicted of vagrancy on December 26th, and sold to Mr. Fetters for four months to pay your fine and costs. The four months won't be up for a week. Mr. Turner may be sworn."

Turner swore to Bud's escape and his pursuit. Haines testified to his capture.

"Have you anything to say?" asked the justice.

"What's de use er my sayin' anything," muttered the Negro. "It won't make no diff'ence. I didn' do nothin', in de fus' place,

ter be fine' fer, an' run away 'cause dey did n' have no right ter keep me dere."

"Guilty. Twenty-five dollars an' costs. You are also charged with resisting the officer who made the arrest. Guilty or not guilty? Since you don't speak, I'll enter a plea of not guilty. Mr. Haines may be sworn."

Haines swore that the prisoner had resisted arrest, and had only been captured by the display of a loaded revolver. The prisoner was convicted and fined twenty-five dollars and costs for this second offense.

The third charge, for disorderly conduct in prison, was quickly disposed of, and a fine of twenty-five dollars and costs levied.

"You may consider yo'self lucky," said the magistrate, "that Mr. Haines didn't prefer a mo' serious charge against you. Many a nigger has gone to the gallows for less. And now, gentlemen, I want to clean this case up right here. How much time is offered for the fine and costs of the prisoner, Bud Johnson, amounting to seventy-five dollars fine and thirty-three dollars and fifty-fo' cents costs? You've heard the evidence an' you see the nigger. Ef there ain't much competition for his services and the time is a long one, he'll have his own stubbornness an' deviltry to thank for it. He's strong and healthy and able to do good work for any one that can manage him."

There was no immediate response. Turner walked forward and viewed the prisoner from head to foot with a coldly sneering look.

"Well, Bud," he said, "I reckon we'll hafter try it ag'in. I have never yet allowed a nigger to git the better o' me, an', moreover, I never will. I'll bid eighteen months, Squire; an' that's all he's worth, with his keep."

There was no competition, and the prisoner was knocked down to Turner, for Fetters, for eighteen months.

"Lock 'im up till I'm ready to go, Bill," said Turner to the constable, "an' just leave the irons on him. I'll fetch 'em back next time I come to town."

The unconscious brutality of the proceeding grated harshly upon the colonel's nerves. Delinquents of some kind these men must be, who were thus dealt with; but he had lived away from the South so long that so sudden an introduction to some of its customs came with something of a shock. He had remembered the pleasant things, and these but vaguely, since his thoughts and his interests had been elsewhere; and in the sifting process of a healthy memory he had forgotten the disagreeable things altogether. He had found the pleasant things still in existence, faded but still fragrant. Fresh from a land of labour unions, and of struggle for wealth and power, of strivings first for equality with those above, and, this attained, for a point of vantage to look down upon former equals, he had found in old Peter, only the day before, a touching loyalty to a family from which he could no longer expect anything in return. Fresh from a land of women's clubs and women's claims, he had reveled last night in the charming domestic, life of the old South, so perfectly

preserved in a quiet household. Things Southern, as he had already reflected, lived long and died hard, and these things which he saw now in the clear light of day, were also of the South, and singularly suggestive of other things Southern which he had supposed outlawed and discarded long ago.

"Now, Mr. Haines, bring in the next lot," said the Squire.

The constable led out an old coloured man, clad in a quaint assortment of tattered garments, whom the colonel did not for a moment recognise, not having, from where he stood, a full view of the prisoner's face.

"Gentlemen, I now call yo'r attention to Lot Number Fo', left over from befo' the wah; not much for looks, but respectful and obedient, and accustomed, for some time past, to eat very little. Can be made useful in many ways—can feed the chickens, take care of the children, or would make a good skeercrow. What I am bid, gentlemen, for ol' Peter French? The amount due the co't is twenty-fo' dollahs and a half."

There was some laughter at the Squire's facetiousness. Turner, who had bid on the young and strong men, turned away unconcernedly.

"You'd 'a' made a good auctioneer, Squire," said the one-armed man.

"Thank you, Mr. Pearsall. How much am I offered for this bargain?"

"He'd be dear at any price," said one.

"It's a great risk," observed a second.

"Ten yeahs," said a third.

"You're takin' big chances, Mr. Bennet," said another. "He'll die in five, and you'll have to bury him."

"I withdraw the bid," said Mr. Bennet promptly.

"Two yeahs," said another.

The colonel was boiling over with indignation. His interest in the fate of the other prisoners had been merely abstract; in old Peter's case it assumed a personal aspect. He forced himself into the room and to the front.

"May I ask the meaning of this proceeding?" he demanded.

"Well, suh," replied the Justice, "I don't know who you are, or what right you have to interfere, but this is the sale of a vagrant nigger, with no visible means of suppo't. Perhaps, since you're interested, you'd like to bid on 'im. Are you from the No'th, likely?"

"Yes."

"I thought, suh, that you looked like a No'the'n man. That bein' so, doubtless you'd like somethin' on the Uncle Tom order. Old Peter's fine is twenty dollars, and the costs fo' dollars and a half. The prisoner's time is sold to whoever pays his fine and allows him the shortest time to work it out. When his time's up, he goes free."

"And what has old Peter done to deserve a fine of twenty dollars—more money than he perhaps has ever had at any one time?"

"'Deed, it is, Mars Henry, 'deed it is!" exclaimed Peter,

fervently.

"Peter has not been able," replied the magistrate, "to show this co't that he has reg'lar employment, or means of suppo't, and he was therefore tried and convicted yesterday evenin' of vagrancy, under our State law. The fine is intended to discourage laziness and to promote industry. Do you want to bid, suh? I'm offered two yeahs, gentlemen, for old Peter French? Does anybody wish to make it less?"

"I'll pay the fine," said the colonel, "let him go."

"I beg yo' pahdon, suh, but that wouldn't fulfil the requi'ments of the law. He'd be subject to arrest again immediately. Somebody must take the responsibility for his keep."

"I'll look after him," said the colonel shortly.

"In order to keep the docket straight," said the justice, "I should want to note yo' bid. How long shall I say?"

"Say what you like," said the colonel, drawing out his pocketbook.

"You don't care to bid, Mr. Turner?" asked the justice.

"Not by a damn sight," replied Turner, with native elegance. "I buy niggers to work, not to bury."

"I withdraw my bid in favour of the gentleman," said the two-year bidder.

"Thank you," said the colonel.

"Remember, suh," said the justice to the colonel, "that you are responsible for his keep as well as entitled to his labour, for the period of your bid. How long shall I make it?"

"As long as you please," said the colonel impatiently.

"Sold," said the justice, bringing down his gavel, "for life, to —what name, suh?"

"French—Henry French."

There was some manifestation of interest in the crowd; and the colonel was stared at with undisguised curiosity as he paid the fine and costs, which included two dollars for two meals in the guardhouse, and walked away with his purchase—a purchase which his father had made, upon terms not very different, fifty years before.

"One of the old Frenches," I reckon, said a bystander, "come back on a visit."

"Yes," said another, "old 'ristocrats roun' here. Well, they ought to take keer of their old niggers. They got all the good out of 'em when they were young. But they're not runnin' things now."

An hour later the colonel, driving leisurely about the outskirts of the town and seeking to connect his memories more closely with the scenes around him, met a buggy in which sat the man Turner. After the buggy, tied behind one another to a rope, like a coffle of slaves, marched the three Negroes whose time he had bought at the constable's sale. Among them, of course, was the young man who had been called Bud Johnson. The colonel observed that this Negro's face, when turned toward the white man in front of him, expressed a fierce hatred, as of some wild thing of the woods, which finding itself trapped and betrayed,

would go to any length to injure its captor.

Turner passed the colonel with no sign of recognition or greeting.

Bud Johnson evidently recognised the friendly gentleman who had interfered in Peter's case. He threw toward the colonel a look which resembled an appeal; but it was involuntary, and lasted but a moment, and, when the prisoner became conscious of it, and realised its uselessness, it faded into the former expression.

What the man's story was, the colonel did not know, nor what were his deserts. But the events of the day had furnished food for reflection. Evidently Clarendon needed new light and leading. Men, even black men, with something to live for, and with work at living wages, would scarcely prefer an enforced servitude in ropes and chains. And the punishment had scarcely seemed to fit the crime. He had observed no great zeal for work among the white people since he came to town; such work as he had seen done was mostly performed by Negroes. If idleness were a crime, the Negroes surely had no monopoly of it.

Nine

Furnished with money for his keep, Peter was ordered if again molested to say that he was in the colonel's service. The latter, since his own plans were for the present uncertain, had no very clear idea of what disposition he would ultimately make of the old man, but he meant to provide in some way for his declining years. He also bought Peter a neat suit of clothes at a clothing store, and directed him to present himself at the hotel on the following morning. The interval would give the colonel time to find something for Peter to do, so that he would be able to pay him a wage. To his contract with the county he attached little importance; he had already intended, since their meeting in the cemetery, to provide for Peter in some way, and the legal responsibility was no additional burden. To Peter himself, to whose homeless old age food was more than philosophy, the arrangement seemed entirely satisfactory.

Colonel French's presence in Clarendon had speedily become known to the public. Upon his return to the hotel, after leaving Peter to his own devices for the day, he found several cards in his letter box, left by gentlemen who had called, during his absence, to see him.

The daily mail had also come in, and the colonel sat down in the office to read it. There was a club notice, and several letters that had been readdressed and forwarded, and a long one from

Kirby in reference to some detail of the recent transfer. Before he had finished reading these, a gentleman came up and introduced himself. He proved to be one John McLean, an old schoolmate of the colonel, and later a comrade-in-arms, though the colonel would never have recognised a rather natty major in his own regiment in this shabby middle-aged man, whose shoes were run down at the heel, whose linen was doubtful, and spotted with tobacco juice. The major talked about the weather, which was cool for the season; about the Civil War, about politics, and about the Negroes, who were very trifling, the major said. While they were talking upon this latter theme, there was some commotion in the street, in front of the hotel, and looking up they saw that a horse, attached to a loaded wagon, had fallen in the roadway, and having become entangled in the harness, was kicking furiously. Five or six Negroes were trying to quiet the animal, and release him from the shafts, while a dozen white men looked on and made suggestions.

"An illustration," said the major, pointing through the window toward the scene without, "of what we've got to contend with. Six niggers can't get one horse up without twice as many white men to tell them how. That's why the South is behind the No'th. The niggers, in one way or another, take up most of our time and energy. You folks up there have half your work done before we get our'n started."

The horse, pulled this way and that, in obedience to the conflicting advice of the bystanders, only became more and more

intricately entangled. He had caught one foot in a manner that threatened, with each frantic jerk, to result in a broken leg, when the colonel, leaving his visitor without ceremony, ran out into the street, leaned down, and with a few well-directed movements, released the threatened limb.

"Now, boys," he said, laying hold of the prostrate animal, "give a hand here."

The Negroes, and, after some slight hesitation, one or two white men, came to the colonel's aid, and in a moment, the horse, trembling and blowing, was raised to its feet. The driver thanked the colonel and the others who had befriended him, and proceeded with his load.

When the flurry of excitement was over, the colonel went back to the hotel and resumed the conversation with his friend. If the new franchise amendment went through, said the major, the Negro would be eliminated from politics, and the people of the South, relieved of the fear of "nigger domination," could give their attention to better things, and their section would move forward along the path of progress by leaps and bounds. Of himself the major said little except that he had been an alternate delegate to the last Democratic National Nominating Convention, and that he expected to run for coroner at the next county election.

"If I can secure the suppo't of Mr. Fetters in the primaries," he said, "my nomination is assured, and a nomination is of co'se equivalent to an election. But I see there are some other

gentlemen that would like to talk to you, and I won't take any mo' of yo' time at present."

"Mr. Blake," he said, addressing a gentleman with short side-whiskers who was approaching them, "have you had the pleasure of meeting Colonel French?"

"No, suh," said the stranger, "I shall be glad to have the honour of an introduction at your hands."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.