

Eggleston George Cary

The Master of Warlock: A Virginia War Story



George Eggleston

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I

A break in the bridge

The road was a winding, twisting track as it threaded its way through a stretch of old field pines. The land was nearly level at that point, and quite unobstructed, so that there was not the slightest reason that ordinary intelligence could discover for the roadway's devious wanderings. It might just as well have run straight through the pine lands.

But in Virginia people were never in a hurry. They had all of leisure that well-settled and perfectly self-satisfied ways of life could bring to a people whose chief concern it was to live uprightly and happily in that state of existence into which it had pleased God to call them. What difference could it make to a people so minded, whether the journey to the Court-house – the centre and seat of county activities of all kinds – were a mile or two longer or shorter by reason of meaningless curves in the road, or by reason of a lack of them? Why should they bother to straighten out road windings that had the authority of long use for their being? And why should the well-fed negro drivers of family carriages shake themselves out of their customary and comfortable naps in order to drive more directly across the pine land, when the horses, if left to themselves, would placidly follow the traditional track?

The crookedness of the road was a fact, and Virginians of that time always accepted and respected facts to which they had been long accustomed. For that sufficient reason Baillie Pegram, the young master of Warlock, was not thinking of the road at all, but accepting it as he did the greenery of the trees and the bursting of the buds, as he jogged along at a dog-trot on that fine April morning in the year of our Lord 1861.

He was well mounted upon a mettlesome sorrel mare, – a mare with pronounced ideas of her own. The young man had taught her to bend these somewhat to his will, but her individuality was not yet so far subdued or suppressed as to lose itself in that of her master. So she suddenly halted and vigorously snorted as she came within sight of the little bridge over Dogwood Branch, where a horse and a young gentlewoman were obviously in trouble.

I name the horse and the girl in that ungallant reverse order, because that was the order in which they revealed themselves to the mare and her master. For the girl was on the farther side of the horse, and stooping, so that she could not be seen at a first glance. As she heard approaching hoof-beats she straightened herself into that dignity of demeanour which every young Virginia gentlewoman felt it to be her supreme duty in life to maintain under any and all circumstances.

She was gowned in the riding-habit of that time, with glove-fitting body and a skirt so long that, even when its wearer sat upon a high horse, it extended to within eighteen inches of the ground. When Baillie Pegram reached the little bridge and hastily dismounted, she was standing as erect as a young hickory-tree, making the most of her five feet four of height, and holding the skirt up sufficiently to free her feet. She wore a look half of welcome, half of defiance on her face. The defiance was prompted by a high-bred maidenly sense of propriety and by something else. The welcome was due to an instinctive rejoicing in the coming of masculine help. For the girl was indeed in sore need of assistance. Her horse had slipped his foot through a break in the bridge flooring, and after a painful struggle, had given up the attempt to extricate it. He was panting with pain, and his young mistress was sympathetically sharing every pain that he suffered.

Baillie Pegram gave the girl a rather formal greeting as he dismounted. Stooping he examined the imprisoned leg of the animal. Then seizing a stone from the margin of the stream, he quickly beat the planking loose from its fastenings, releasing the poor brute from its pillory. But the freed foot did not plant itself upon the ground again. The horse held it up, limp and dangling. Seeing what had happened, the young man promptly ungirthed the saddles, and transferred that of the young woman to the back of his own animal.

"You must take my mare, Miss Ronald," he said. "Your horse is in no condition to carry you, and, poor fellow, he never will be again."

"Just what has happened, Mr. Pegram?" the girl asked, with a good deal of hauteur in her tone.

"Your horse's leg is broken beyond all possibility of repair," he answered. "I will take care of him for you, and you must ride my mare. She is a trifle unruly at times, and not very bridle-wise, so that she is scarcely fit for a lady's use. But I take it you know how to ride."

The girl did not answer at once. After a space she said:

"You forget that I am Agatha Ronald."

"No, I do not forget," he answered. "I remember that fact with regret whenever I think of you. However, under the circumstances, you must so far overcome your prejudice as to accept the use of my mare."

There was a mingling of hauteur and amusement in the girl's voice and countenance as she answered:

"Permit me, Mr. Pegram, to thank you for your courteous proffer of help, *and to decline it.*"

"I need no thanks," he said, "for a trifling courtesy which is so obviously imperative. As for declining it, why of course you cannot do that."

"Why not?" she asked, resentfully. "Am I not my own mistress? Surely you would not take advantage of my mishap to force unwelcome attentions upon me?"

The utterance was an affront, and Baillie Pegram saw clearly that it was intended to be such. He bit his lip, but controlled himself.

"I will not think," he answered, "that you quite meant to say that. You are too just to do even me a wrong, and surely I have not deserved such an affront at your hands. Nor can the circumstances that prompt you to decline any unnecessary courtesy at my hands justify you in – well, in saying what you have just said. I have not sought to force attentions upon you, and you know it. I have only asked you to let me behave like a gentleman under circumstances which are not of my making or my seeking. Your horse is hopelessly lamed – so hopelessly that as soon as you are gone, I am going to kill him by the roadside as an act of ordinary humanity. You are fully five miles from The Oaks, where you are staying with your aunts. Except in this bit of pine barren, the roads are exceedingly muddy. You are habited for riding, and you could not walk far in that costume, even upon the best of roads. You simply must make use of my mare. I cannot permit you to refuse. If I did so, I should incur the lasting and just disapproval of your aunts, The Oaks ladies. You certainly do not wish me to do that. I have placed your saddle upon my mare, and I am waiting to help you mount."

The girl hesitated, bewildered, unwilling, and distinctly in that feminine state of mind which women call "vexed." At last she asked:

"What will you do if I refuse?"

"O, in that case I shall turn the mare loose, and walk at a respectful distance behind you as you trudge over the miry road, until you become hopelessly involved in the red clay at Vinegar Post. Then I shall rush to your rescue like a gallant knight, and carry you pick-a-back all the way to The Oaks. It will be a singularly undignified approach to a mansion in which the proprieties of life are sternly insisted upon. Don't you think you'd better take the mare, Miss Ronald?"

The girl stood silent for nearly a minute in a half-angry mood of resistance, which was in battle with the laughing demon that just now possessed her. She did not want to laugh. She was determined

not to laugh. Therefore she laughed uncontrollably, as one is apt to do when something ludicrous occurs at a funeral. Presently she said:

"I wonder what it was all about anyhow – the quarrel, I mean, between your grandfather and my poor father?"

There was a touch of melancholy in her tone as she spoke of her "poor father" – for that phrase, in Virginian usage, always meant that the dear one mentioned was dead. "I wonder what it was that makes it so imperative for me to be formally courteous beyond the common to you, and at the same time highly improper for me to accept such ordinary courtesies at your hands as I freely accept from others, thinking nothing about the matter."

"Would you really like to know?" the young man asked.

"Yes – no. I'm not quite certain. Sometimes I want to know – just now, for example – so that I may know just what my duty is. But at other times I think it should be enough for me, as a well-ordered young person, to know that I must be loyal to my poor father's memory, and never forgive a Pegram while I live. My good aunts have taught me that much, but they have never told me anything about the origin of the feud. All I know is that, in order to be true to the memory of my poor father, who died before I was born, I must always remember that the Ronalds and the Pegrams are hereditary enemies. That is why I refuse to use the mare which you have so courteously offered me, Mr. Pegram."

"Still," answered the young man, as if arguing the matter out with himself, "it might not compromise your dignity so much to ride a mare that belongs to me, as to let me 'tote' you home – for that is precisely what I must do if you persist in your refusal."

The girl again laughed, merrily this time, but still she hesitated:

"Listen!" said Baillie; "that's my boy Sam coming. It would be unseemly for us to continue our quarrel in the presence of a servant."

As he spoke the voice of Sam rose from beyond the pines, in a ditty which he was singing with all the power of a robust set of vocal organs:

"My own Eliza gal – she's de colour ob de night,
When de moon it doesn't shine a little bit;
But her teeth shows white in de shaddah ob de night,
And her eyes is like a lantern when it's lit.

"Oh, Eliza!
How I prize yeh!
You'se de nicest gal dere is;
It's fer you dat I'se a-pinin',
For you're like a star dat's shinin'
When de moon it's done forgotten how to riz."

With that Sam came beaming upon the scene. His round, black, shining visage, and eyes that glittered with a humour which might have won an anchorite to merriment, resembled nothing so much as the sun at its rising, if one may think of the sun as black and glistening from a diligent rubbing with a bacon rind, which was Sam's favourite cosmetic, as it is of all the very black negroes.

Sam was sitting sidewise upon a saddleless mule, but when he saw the situation he quickly slipped to the ground, pulled his woolly forelock in lieu of doffing the hat which he had not, and asked:

"What's de mattah, Mas' Baillie?"

The girl saw the impropriety of continuing the discussion – it had ceased to be a quarrel now – in Sam's presence. So she held out her hand, and said:

"Thank you very much, Mr. Pegram. I will ride your beautiful mare, and to-morrow, if you are so minded, you may call at The Oaks to inquire how the animal has behaved toward me. Good morning, sir!"

She sprang into the saddle without waiting for young Pegram to assist her, for she was even yet determined to accept no more of attention at his hands than she must. He, in his turn, was too greatly relieved by this ending of the embarrassing scene to care for the implied snub to his gallantry. As soon as the girl rode away, which she did without pausing for a moment, Baillie Pegram turned to Sam, and without inquiring upon what errand that worthy had been going, gave the order:

"Mount your mule and ride at a respectful distance behind Miss Agatha Ronald. She may have trouble with that half-broken mare of mine. And mind you, boy, don't entertain the young lady with any of your songs as you go. When you get back to Warlock, bring me a horse to the Court-house, do you hear?"

Then leading the wounded animal upon three legs into the woods near by, Pegram fired a charge of shot from the fowling-piece which he carried, into its brain, killing the poor beast instantly and painlessly.

Having discharged this duty of mercy, the young man, with high boots drawn over his trousers' legs, set out with a brisk stride for the county-seat village, known only as "the Court-house." Entering the clerk's office, he said to the county clerk:

"As a magistrate of this county I direct you to enter a fine of five dollars against Baillie Pegram, Esq., supervisor of the Vinegar Post road, for his neglect to keep the bridge over Dogwood Branch in repair. Here's the money. Give me a receipt, please, and make the proper entries upon the court records."

"Pardon me, Mr. Pegram," answered the clerk, "but you remember that at the last term of the county court, with a full bench of magistrates sitting, it was decided to adjourn the court indefinitely in view of the disturbed condition of the time?"

"I remember that," answered the young man, "but that action was taken only upon the ground that under present circumstances it would work hardship to many for the courts to meet for the enforcement of debts. This is a very different case. As road supervisor I am charged with a public duty which I have neglected. As a magistrate it is my duty to fine every road supervisor who is derelict. No session of the court is necessary for that. I shall certainly not tolerate such neglect of duty on the part of any county officer, particularly when I happen to be myself the derelict official. So enter the fine and give me a receipt for the money."

Does all this impress the reader as quixotic? Was it a foolish sentimentalism that prompted these men to serve their neighbours and the public without pay, and, upon occasion, to hold themselves rigidly responsible to a high standard of duty? Was it quixotism which prompted George Washington to serve his country without one dollar of pay, through seven years of war, as the general of its armies, and through nearly twice that time as President, first of the Constitutional Convention, and afterwards, for eight years, as President of the nation? Was it an absurd sentimentalism that prompted him, after he had declined pay, to decline also the gifts voluntarily and urgently pressed upon him by his own and other States, and by the nation? The humourists ridicule all such sentiment. But the humourists are not a court of final appeal. At any rate, this sentimentality had its good side.

But at this time of extreme excitement, there were, no doubt, ludicrous exaggerations of sentiment and conduct now and then, and on this sixteenth day of April, 1861, the master of Warlock encountered some things that greatly amused him. Having finished his business in the clerk's office, he found himself in the midst of excited throngs. Startling news had come from Richmond that morning. In view of the bombardment of Fort Sumter, President Lincoln had called for seventy-five thousand men as an army with which to reduce the seceding States to subjection.

Virginia was not one of the seceding States. Up to that time, she had utterly repudiated the thought that secession was justified by Mr. Lincoln's election, or by any threat to the South which his accession to office implied.

The statesmen of Virginia had busied themselves for months with efforts to find a way out of the difficulties that beset the country. They were intent upon saving that Union which had been born of Virginia's suggestion, if such saving could be accomplished by any means that did not involve dishonour. The people of Virginia, when called upon to decide the question of their own course in such a crisis by the election of a constitutional convention, had overwhelmingly decided it against secession, and in favour of adherence to the Union. Under Virginia's influence, Maryland, North Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky, Arkansas, and Missouri had refused to secede.

But while the Virginians were thus opposed to secession, and while they were fully convinced that secession was neither necessary nor advisable under the circumstances then existing, they were of one mind in believing that the constitutional right of any State to withdraw from the Union at will was absolute and indefeasible. So when Mr. Lincoln called upon Virginia for her quota of troops with which to coerce back into the Union those States which had exercised what the Virginians held to be their rightful privilege of withdrawal, it seemed to the Virginians that there was forced upon them a choice between secession and unspeakable dishonour. They wanted to remain in the Union, of which their State had been from the beginning so influential a part. They were intensely loyal to the history and traditions of that Union over which their Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, and Tyler had presided, and at the head of whose supreme court their John Marshall had so wisely interpreted the constitution. But when Mr. Lincoln notified them that they must furnish their quota of troops with which to make war upon sister States for exercising a right which the Virginians deemed unquestionable, they felt that they had no choice but to join the seceding States and take the consequences.

What a pity it seems, as we look back upon that crisis of forty odd years ago, that Mr. Lincoln could not have found some other way out of his difficulties! What a pity that he could not have seen his way clear to omit Virginia and the other border States from his call for troops, with which to make war upon secession! Doubtless it was impracticable for him to make such a distinction. But the pity of it is none the less on that account. For if this might have been done, there would have been no civil war worthy the attention of the historian or the novelist. In that case the battles of Bull Run, the Seven Days, Fredericksburg, Antietam, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, the Wilderness, Spottsylvania, Cold Harbour, and the rest of the bloody encounters would never have been fought. In that case the country would not have exhausted itself with four years of strenuous war, enlisting 2,700,000 men on one side, and 600,000 on the other. In that case many thousands of brave young lives would have been spared, and the desolation of homes by tens of thousands would not have come upon the land.

It is idle, however, to speculate in "if's," even when their significance is so sadly obvious as it is in this case. Facts are facts, and the all-dominating fact on that 16th of April, 1861, was that President Lincoln had called upon Virginia for her quota of troops with which to make war upon the seceding States, and that Virginia had no mind to respond to the call.

It was certain now, that Virginia – however reluctantly and however firmly convinced she might be that secession was uncalled for on the part of the Southern States, would adopt an ordinance of secession, and thus make inevitable the coming of the greatest war in all history, where otherwise no war at all, or at most an insignificant one, would have occurred.

There was no question in the minds of any body at the Court-house on this sixteenth day of April, 1861, that Virginia would secede as soon as a vote could be taken in the convention.

The county was a small one, insignificant in the number of its white inhabitants, – there being six negroes to one white in its population, – but it was firmly convinced that upon its attitude depended the fate of Virginia, and perhaps of the nation. This conviction was strong, at any rate, in the minds of the three local orators who had ordered a muster for this day in order that they might have an

audience to harangue. These were Colonel Gregor, of the militia and the bar, Lieutenant-Colonel Simpson, also of the bar and the militia, and Captain Sam Guthrie, who commanded a troop of uniformed horsemen, long ago organised for purposes of periodical picnicking. This troop afterward rendered conspicuously good service in Stuart's First Regiment of Virginia cavalry, but not under Captain Guthrie's command. That officer, early in the campaign, developed a severe case of nervous prostration, and retired. The militiamen also volunteered, and rendered their full four years of service. But Lieutenant-Colonel Simpson retired during his first and only skirmish, while Colonel Gregor discovered in himself a divine call to the ministry of the gospel, and stayed at home to answer it. But all this came later. In April, 1861, these three were the eager advocates of war, instant and terrible. Under inspiration of the news from Richmond, they spouted like geysers throughout that day. They could not have been more impassioned in their pleas if theirs had been a reluctant community, in danger of disgracing itself by refusing to furnish its fair share of volunteers for Virginia's defence, though in fact every able-bodied man in the county had already signified his intention of volunteering at the first opportunity.

But the orators were not minded to miss so good an opportunity to display their eloquence, and impress themselves upon the community. Colonel Gregor, in a fine burst of eloquence, warned his fellow citizens, whom he always addressed as "me countrymen," to examine themselves carefully touching their personal courage, "for," he thundered, "where Gregor leads, brave men must follow."

Later in the day, Lieutenant-Colonel Simpson hit upon the happy idea, which his superior officer at once adopted, of ordering the entire militia of the county into camp at the Court-house, where the three men eloquent might harangue them at will between drills. The two field-officers told the men that they must now regard themselves as minute men, and hold themselves in readiness to respond at a moment's notice to the country's call, for the repelling of invasion, whensoever it might come.

All this impressed Baillie Pegram as ridiculous. That young gentleman had a saving sense of humour, but he was content to smile at a foolishness in which he had no mind to join. The young men of the county responded enthusiastically to the encampment call. It meant for them some days of delightful picnicking, with dancing in the evening.

Baillie Pegram, having business to transact in Richmond, absented himself from a frolic not to his taste, and took the noonday train for the State capital.

II

The bringing up of agatha

Agatha Roland was a particularly well ordered young gentlewoman, at least during her long, half-yearly visits to her aunts at The Oaks. At home with her maternal grandfather, Colonel Archer, she was neither well nor ill ordered – she was not ordered at all. She gave orders instead, in a gentle way; and her word was law, by virtue of her grandfather's insistence that it should be so regarded, and still more by reason of something in herself that gently gave authority to her will.

Agatha had been born at The Oaks, and that plantation was to be her property at the death of her two elderly maiden aunts, her dead father's sisters. But she had been taken as a little child to the distant home of her grandfather, Colonel Archer, and after her mother's death she had lived there alone with that sturdy old Virginia gentleman.

She was less than seven years old when he installed her behind the tea-tray in her dead mother's stead, and made her absolute mistress of the mansion, issuing the order that "whatever Miss Agatha wants done must be done, or I will find out why." Her good aunts sought to interfere at first, but they soon learned better. They wanted the girl to come to them at The Oaks "for her bringing up," they said. Upon that plan Colonel Archer instantly put a veto that was not the less peremptory for the reason that he could not "put his foot down" just then, because of an attack of the gout. Then the good ladies urged him to take "some gentlewoman of mature years and high character" into his house, "to look after the child's bringing up, so that her manners may be such as befit a person of her lineage."

To this appeal the old gentleman replied:

"I'll look after all that myself. I don't want the child taught a lot of nonsense, and I won't have her placed under anybody's authority. She doesn't need control, any more than the birds do; she shall grow up here at Willoughby in perfect freedom and naturalness. I'll be responsible for the result. She shall wear bonnets whenever she wants to, and go without them whenever that pleases her best; when she wants to go barefoot and wade in the branches, as all healthy children like to do, she shall not be told that her conduct is 'highly improper,' and all that nonsense. O, I know," he said, in anticipation of a protest that he saw coming, "I know she'll get 'dreadfully tanned,' and become a tomboy – and all the rest of it. But I'll answer for it that when she grows up her perfectly healthy skin will bear comparison with the complexion of the worst house-burnt young woman in all the land, and as for her figure, nature will take care of that under the life of liberty that she's going to live, in the air and sunshine."

"But you'll surely send her to school?"

"Not if I retain my senses. I remember my humanities well enough to teach her all the Latin, Greek, and mathematics she needs. We'll read history and literature together, and as for French, I speak that language a good deal better than most of the dapper little dancing-masters do who keep 'young ladies' seminaries.' We'll ride horseback together every day, and I'll teach her French while I'm teaching her how to take an eight-rail fence at a gallop."

The remonstrances were continued for a time, until one day the old gentleman made an end of them by saying:

"I have heard all I want to hear on that subject. It is not to be mentioned to me again."

Everybody who knew Colonel Archer knew that when he spoke in that tone of mingled determination and self-restraint, it was a dictate of prudence to respect his wish. So after that Agatha and he lived alone at Willoughby, a plantation in Northern Virginia three or four days distant by carriage from The Oaks.

Morning, noon, and night, these two were inseparable companions. "Chummie" was the pet name she gave him in her childish days, and he would never permit her to address him by any other as she grew up.

Old soldier that he was, – for he had commanded a company under Jackson at New Orleans, and had been a colonel during the war with Mexico, – it was his habit to exact implicit obedience within his own domain. He was the kindest of masters, but his will was law on the plantation, and as everybody there recognised the fact, he never had occasion to give an order twice, or to mete out censure for disobedience. But for Agatha there was no law. Colonel Archer would permit none, while she in her turn made it her one study in life to be and do whatever her "Chummie" liked best.

Colonel Archer had a couple of gardeners, of course, but their work was mainly to do the rougher things of horticulture. He and Agatha liked to do the rest for themselves. They prepared the garden-beds, seeded them, and carefully nursed their growths into fruitage, he teaching her, as they did so, that love of all growing things which is botany's best lesson.

"And the plants love us back again, Chummie," she one day said to him, while she was still a little child. "They smile when we go near them, and sometimes the pansies whisper to me. I'm sure of that."

She was at that time a slender child, with big, velvety brown eyes and a tangled mass of brown hair which her maid Martha struggled in vain to reduce to subjection. She usually put on a sunbonnet when she went to the garden in the early morning; but when it obstructed her vision, or otherwise annoyed her, she would push it off, letting it fall to her back and hang by its strings about her neck. Even then it usually became an annoyance, particularly when she wanted to climb a fruit-tree, and Martha would find it later, resting upon a cluster of rose-bushes, or hung upon a fence-paling.

The pair of chums – the sturdy old gentleman and the little girl – had no regular hours for any of their employments, but at some hour of every day, they got out their books and read or studied together.

They were much on horseback, too, and when autumn came they would tramp together through stubble fields and broom-straw growths, shooting quails on the wing – partridges, they correctly called them, as it is the habit of everybody in Virginia to do, for the reason that the bird which the New York marketman calls "quail," is properly named "Partridge Virginensis," while the bird that the marketman sells as a partridge is not a partridge at all, but a grouse. The girl became a good shot during her first season, and a year later she challenged her grandfather to a match, to see who could bag the greater number of birds. At the end of the morning's sport, her bag outnumbered her companion's by two birds; but when the count was made, she looked with solemn eyes into her grandfather's face and, shaking her head in displeasure, said:

"Chummie, you've been cheating! I don't like to think it of you, but it's true. You've missed several birds on purpose to let me get ahead of you. I'll never count birds with you again."

The old gentleman tried to laugh the matter off, but the girl would not consent to that. After awhile she said: "I'll forgive you this time, Chummie; but I'll never count birds with you again."

"But why not, Ladybird?"

"Why, because you don't like to beat me, and I don't like to beat you. So if we go on counting birds and each trying to lose the match, we'll get to be very bad shots. Besides that, Chummie, cheating will impair your character."

But the girl was not left without the companionship of girls of her own age. Colonel Archer was too wise a student of human nature for that. So from the beginning he planned to give her the companionship she needed.

"You are the mistress of Willoughby, you know, Agatha," he said to her one day, "and you must keep up the reputation of the place for hospitality. You must have your dining-days like the rest, and invite your friends."

And she did so. She would send out her little notes, written in a hand that closely resembled that of her grandfather, begging half a dozen girls, daughters of the planters round about, to dine with her, and they would come in their carriages, attended by their negro maids. It was Colonel Archer's

delight to watch Agatha on these occasions, and observe the very serious way in which she sought to discharge her duties as a hospitable hostess in becoming fashion.

A little later he encouraged her to invite two or three of her young friends, now and then, to stay for a few days or a week with her, after the Virginian custom. But not until she was twelve years old did he consent to spare her for longer than a single night. Then he agreed with The Oaks ladies that she should spend a few weeks in the spring and a few in the late summer or autumn of every year with them. They welcomed the arrangement as one which would at least give them an opportunity to "form the girl." During her semi-annual visits to The Oaks they very diligently set themselves to work drilling her in the matter of respect for the formalities of life.

The process rather interested Agatha, and sometimes it even amused her. She was solemnly enjoined not to do things that she had never thought of doing, and as earnestly instructed to do things which she had never in her life neglected to do.

At first she was too young to formulate the causes of her interest and amusement in this process. But her mind matured rapidly in association with her grandfather, and she began at last to analyse the matter.

"When I go to The Oaks," she wrote to her "Chummie" one day, "I feel like a sinner going to do penance; but the penance is rather amusing than annoying. I am made to feel how shockingly improper I have been at Willoughby with you, Chummie, during the preceding six months, and how necessary it is for me to submit myself for a season to a control that shall undo the effects of the liberty in which I live at Willoughby. I am made to understand that liberty is the very worst thing a girl or a woman can indulge herself in. Am I very bad, Chummie?"

For answer the old gentleman laughed aloud. Then he wrote:

"You see how shrewdly I have managed this thing, Ladybird. I wouldn't let you go to The Oaks till you had become too fully confirmed in your habit of being free, ever to be reformed."

Later, and more seriously, he said to the girl:

"Every human being is the better for being free – women as well as men. Liberty to a human being is like sunshine and fresh air. Restraint is like medicine – excellent for those who are ill, but very bad indeed for healthy people. Did it ever occur to you, Agatha, that you never took a pill or a powder in your life? You haven't needed medicine because you've had air and sunshine; no more do you need restraint, and for the same reason. You are perfectly healthy in your mind as well as in your body."

"But, Chummie, you don't know how very ill regulated I am. Aunt Sarah and Aunt Jane disapprove very seriously of many things that I do."

"What things?"

"Well, they say, for example, that it is very unladylike for me to call you 'Chummie,' – that it indicates a want of that respect for age and superiority which every young person – you know I am only a 'young person' to them – should scrupulously cultivate."

"Well, now, let me give you warning, Miss Agatha Ronald; if you ever call me anything but 'Chummie,' I'll alter my will, and leave this plantation to the Abolitionist Society as an experiment station."

Nevertheless, Agatha Ronald was, as has been said at the beginning of this chapter, a particularly well ordered young gentlewoman so long as she remained as a guest with her aunts at The Oaks. She loved the gentle old ladies dearly, and strove with all her might, while with them, to comport herself in accordance with their standards of conduct on the part of a young gentlewoman.

Sometimes, however, her innocence misled her, as it had done on that morning when Baillie Pegram had met her at the bridge over Dogwood Branch. The spirit of the morning had taken possession of her on that occasion, and she had so far reverted from her condition of dame-nurtured grace into her habitual state of nature as to mount her horse and ride away without the escort even of a negro groom. It was not at all unusual at that time for young gentlewomen in Virginia to ride thus alone, but The Oaks ladies strongly disapproved the custom, as they disapproved all other customs

that had come into being since their own youth had passed away, especially all customs that in any way tended to enlarge the innocent liberty of young women. On this point the good ladies were as rigidly insistent as if they had been the ladies superior of a convent of young nuns. They could not have held liberty for young gentlewomen in greater dread and detestation, had they believed, as they certainly did not, in the total depravity of womankind.

"It is not that we fear you would do anything wrong, dear," they would gently explain. "It is only that – well, you see a young gentlewoman cannot be too careful."

Agatha did not see, but she yielded to the prejudices of her aunts with a loyalty all the more creditable to her for the reason that she did not and could not share their views. On this occasion she had not thought of offending. It had not occurred to her that there could be the slightest impropriety in her desire to greet the morning on horseback, and certainly it had not entered her mind that she might meet Baillie Pegram and be compelled to accept a courtesy at his hands. She knew, as she rode silently homeward after that meeting at the bridge, that in this respect she had sinned beyond overlooking.

For Agatha Ronald knew that she must be on none but the most distant and formal terms with the master of Warlock. She had learned that lesson at Christmas-time, three months before. She had spent the Christmas season in Richmond, with some friends. There Baillie Pegram had met her for the first time since she had attained her womanhood – for he had been away at college, at law school, or on his travels at the time of all her more recent sojourns at The Oaks. He had known her very slightly as a shy and wild little girl, but the woman Agatha was a revelation to him, and her beauty not less than her charm of manner and her unusual intelligence, had fascinated him. He frequented the house of her Richmond friends, and had opportunities to learn more every day of herself. He did not pause to analyse his feeling for her; he only knew that it was quite different from any that he had ever experienced before. And Agatha, in her turn and in her candor, had admitted to herself that she "liked" young Pegram better than any other young man she had ever met.

No word of love had passed between these two, and both were unconscious of their state of mind, when their intercourse was suddenly interrupted. A note came to Baillie one day from Agatha, in which the frank and fearlessly honest young woman wrote:

"I am not to see you any more, Mr. Pegram. I am informed by my relatives that there are circumstances for which neither of us is responsible, which render it quite improper that you and I should be friends. I am very sorry, but I think it my duty to tell you this myself. I thank you for all your kindnesses to me before we knew about this thing."

That was absolutely all there was of the note, but it was quite enough. It had set Baillie to inquiring concerning a feud of which he vaguely knew the existence, but to which he had never before given the least attention.

That is how it came about that Agatha rode sadly homeward after the meeting at the bridge, wondering how she could have done otherwise than accept the use of Baillie Pegram's mare, and wondering still more what her aunts would say to her concerning the matter.

"Anyhow," she thought at last, "I've done no intentional wrong. Chummie would not blame me if he were here, and I am not sure that I shall accept much blame at anybody's else hands. I'll be good and submissive if I can, but – well, I don't know. Maybe I'll hurry back home to Chummie."

III

Jessamine and honeysuckle

It was a peculiarity of inherited quarrels between old Virginia families that they must never be recognised outwardly by any act of discourtesy, and still less by any neglect of formal attention where courtesy was called for. Such quarrels were never mentioned between the families that were involved in them, and equally they were never forgotten. Each member of either family owed it to himself to treat all members of the other family with the utmost deference, while never for a moment permitting that deference to lapse into anything that could be construed to mean forgiveness or forgetfulness.

Agatha, as we have seen, had twice violated the code under which such affairs were conducted; once in the note she had sent to Baillie Pegram in Richmond, and for the second time in giving him permission to call at The Oaks to inquire concerning her journey homeward on his mare. But on both occasions she had been out of the presence and admonitory influence of her aunts, and when absent from them, Agatha Ronald was not at all well regulated, as we know. She was given to acting upon her own natural and healthy-minded impulses, and such impulses were apt to be at war with propriety as propriety was understood and insisted upon at The Oaks.

But Baillie Pegram was not minded to make any mistake in a matter of so much delicacy and importance. He had received Agatha's permission to make that formal call of inquiry, which was customary on all such occasions, and she in her heedlessness had probably meant what she said, as it was her habit to do. But Baillie knew very well that her good aunts would neither expect nor wish him to call upon their niece. At the same time he must not leave his omission to do so unexplained. He must send a note of apology, not to Agatha, – as he would have done to any other young woman under like circumstances, – but to her aunts instead. In a note to them he reported his sudden summons to Richmond, adding that as he was uncertain as to the length of his stay there, he begged the good ladies to accept his absence from home as his sufficient excuse for not calling to inquire concerning the behaviour of his mare during their niece's journey upon that rather uncertain-minded animal's back. This note he gave to Sam for delivery, when Sam brought him the horse he had ordered but no longer wanted.

Baillie Pegram had all the pride of his lineage and his class. He had sought to forget all about Agatha Ronald after her astonishing little note had come to him some months before in Richmond, and until this morning he had believed that he had accomplished that forgetfulness. But now the thought of her haunted him ceaselessly. All the way to Richmond her beauty and her charm, as she had stood there by the roadside, filled his mind with visions that tortured him. He tried with all his might to dismiss the visions and to think of something else. He bought the daily papers and tried to interest himself in their excited utterances, but failed. Red-hot leaders, that were meant to stir all Virginian souls to wrathful resolution, made no impression on his mind. He read them, and knew not what he had read. He was thinking of the girl by the roadside, and his soul was fascinated with the memory of her looks, her words, her finely modulated voice, her ways, as she had tried to refuse his offer of assistance. Had he been of vain and conceited temper, he might have flattered himself with the thought that her very hauteur in converse with him implied something more and better than indifference on her part toward him. But that thought did not enter his mind. He thought instead:

"What a sublimated idiot I am! That girl is nothing to me – worse than nothing. Circumstances place her wholly outside my acquaintance, except in the most formal fashion. She is a young gentlewoman of my own class – distinctly superior to all the other young gentlewomen of that class whom I have ever met, – and ordinarily it would be the most natural thing in the world for me to pay my addresses to her. But in this case that is completely out of the question. To me at least she is the unattainable. I must school myself to think of her no more, and that ought to be easy enough,

as I am not in love with her and am not permitted even to think of being so. It's simply a craze that has taken possession of me for a time, – the instinct of the huntsman, to whom quarry is desirable in the precise ratio of its elusiveness. There, I've thought the whole thing out to an end, and now I must give my mind to something more important."

Yet even in the midst of the excitement that prevailed in Richmond that day, Baillie Pegram did not quite succeed in driving out of his mind the memory of the little tableau by the bridge, or forgetting how supremely fascinating Agatha Ronald had seemed, as she had haughtily declined his offer of service, and still more as she had reluctantly accepted it, and ridden away after so cleverly evading his offer to help her mount.

It had been his purpose to remain in Richmond for a week or more, but on the third morning he found himself homeward bound, and filled with vain imaginings. Just why he had started homeward before the intended time, it would have puzzled him to say; but several times he caught himself wondering if there would be awaiting him at Warlock an answer to his formal note of apology for not having made a call which nobody had expected him to make. He perfectly knew that no such answer was to be expected, and especially that if there should be any answer at all, it must be one of formal and repellent courtesy, containing no message from Agatha of the kind that his troubled imagination persisted in conceiving in spite of the scorn with which he rejected the absurd conjecture.

Nevertheless as he neared home he found himself half-expecting to find there an answer to his note, and he found it. It gave him no pleasure in the reading, and in his present state of mind he could not find even a source of amusement in the stilted formality of its rhetoric. It had been written by one of Agatha's aunts, and signed by both of them. Thus it ran:

"The Misses Ronald of The Oaks feel themselves deeply indebted to Mr. Baillie Pegram for his courtesy to their niece and guest, Miss Agatha Ronald, on the occasion of her recent misadventure. They have also to thank Mr. Pegram most sincerely for having taken upon himself the disagreeable duty of giving painless death to the unfortunate animal that their niece was riding upon that occasion. They have to inform Mr. Pegram that as Miss Agatha Ronald is making her preparations for an almost immediate return to her maternal grandfather's plantation of Willoughby, in Fauquier, and as she will probably begin her journey before Mr. Pegram's return from Richmond, there will scarcely be opportunity for his intended call to inquire concerning her welfare after her homeward ride upon the mare which he so graciously placed at her disposal at a time of sore need. They beg to report that the beautiful animal behaved with the utmost gentleness during the journey.

"The Oaks ladies beg to assure Mr. Pegram of their high esteem, and to express their hope that he will permit none of the events of this troubled time to prevent him from dining with them at The Oaks on the third Friday of each month, as it has been his courteous custom to do in the past. The Misses Ronald remain,
"Most respectfully,
"SARAH RONALD,
"JANE RONALD."

This missive was more than a little bewildering. Its courtesy was extreme. Even in practically telling Baillie Pegram not to call upon their niece, the good ladies had adroitly managed to make their message seem rather one of regret than of prohibition. Certainly there was not a word in the missive at which offence could be taken, and not an expression lacking, the lack of which could imply negligence. The young man read it over several times before he could make out its exact significance, and even then he was not quite sure that he fully understood.

"It reads like a 'joint note' from the Powers to the Grand Turk," he said to the young man – his bosom friend – whom he had found awaiting him at Warlock on his return. This young man, Marshall

Pollard, had been Baillie Pegram's intimate at the university, and now that university days were done, it was his habit to come and go at will at Warlock, the plantation of which Baillie was owner and sole white occupant with the exception of a maiden aunt who presided over his household.

The intimacy between these two young men was always a matter of wonder to their friends. They had few tastes in common, except that both had a passionate love for books. Baillie Pegram was fond of fishing and shooting and riding to hounds. He loved a horse from foretop to fetlock. His friend cared nothing for sport of any kind, and very often he walked over long distances rather than "jolt on horseback," as he explained. He was thoroughly manly, but of dreamy, introspective moods and quiet tastes. But these two agreed in their love of books, and especially of such rare old books as abounded in the Warlock library, the accumulation of generations of cultivated and intellectual men and women. They agreed, too, in their fondness for each other.

Marshall Pollard was never regarded as a guest at Warlock, or treated as such. He came and went at will, giving no account of either his comings or his goings. He did precisely as he pleased, and so did his host, neither ever thinking it necessary to offer an apology for leaving the other alone for a day or for a week, as the case might be. Pollard had his own quarters in the rambling old house, with perfect liberty for their best furnishing. Often the two friends became interested together in a single subject of literary or historical study, and would pore over piles of books in the great hallway if it rained, and out under the spreading trees on the lawn if the weather were fair. Often, on the other hand, their moods would take different courses, and for days together they would scarcely see each other except at meal-times. Theirs was a friendship that trusted itself implicitly.

"It's an ideal friendship, this of yours and mine," said Marshall, in his dreamy way, one day. "It never interferes with the perfect liberty of either. What a pity it is that it must come to an end!"

"But why should it come to an end?" asked his less introspective friend.

"O, because one or the other of us will presently take to himself a wife," was the answer.

"But why should that make a difference? It will not if I am the one to marry first. That will only make your life at Warlock the pleasanter for you. It will give you two devoted friends instead of one."

"It will do nothing of the kind," answered Pollard, with that confidence of tone which suggests that a matter has been completely thought out. "Our friendship is based upon the fact that we both care more for each other than for anybody else. When you get married, you'll naturally and properly care more for your wife than for me. You'd be a brute if you didn't, and I'd quarrel with you. After your marriage we shall continue to be friends, of course, but not in the old way. I'll come to Warlock whenever I please, and go away whenever it suits me to go, just as I do now. But I shall make my bow to my lady when I come, and my adieus to her when I take my departure. I'll enjoy doing that, because I know that your wife will be a charming person, worthy of your devotion to her. But it will not be the same as now. And it will be best so. 'Male and female created he them,' and it would be an abominable shame if you were to remain single for many years to come. It is your duty, and it will presently be your highest pleasure to make some loving and lovable woman as happy as God intended her to be. Better than that – the love of a good woman will make your life richer and worthier than it is now. It will ennoble you, and fit you for the life that your good qualities destine you to lead. You see I've been studying your case, Baillie, and I've made up my mind that there never was a man who needed to marry more than you do. You're a thoroughly good fellow now – but that's about all. You'll be something mightily better than that, when you have the inspiration of a good woman's love to spur you out of your present egotistic self-content, and give you higher purposes in life than those of the well-bred, respectable citizen that you are. You pay your debts; you take excellent care of your negroes; you serve your neighbours as an unpaid magistrate and all that, and it is all very well. But you are capable of much higher things, and when you get yourself a wife worthy of you, you'll rise to a new level of character and conduct."

"And how about you?" the friend asked.

"O, as for me, I don't count. You see, I'm that anomalous thing, a Virginian who doesn't ride horses or care for sport. I'm abnormal. Women like me in a way, and the more elderly ones among them do me the honour to approve me. But that is all. Young women are apt to fall in love with robuster young fellows."

"But you are robust," quickly answered Baillie, "and altogether manly."

"No, I'm not. I'm physically strong enough, of course, but strength isn't all of robustness. I can lift as much as you can, but I don't like to lift, and you do. I can jump as high, but I don't like to jump, while you do. When we were canoeing in Canada a year ago, I could shoot a rapid as well as you, but I'd very much rather have walked down the bank, leaving the guide to navigate the canoe, while you often sent the guide about his business and rebuked his impertinence in offering help where you wanted to do your own helping of yourself without any interference on his part. I remember that just as we were starting on the long and difficult journey to the Lake of the Woods, you dismissed the whole crew of half-breed hangers-on, and we set out alone. I would never have done that, greatly as I detested the unclean company. I went with you, of course, but I went relying upon you for guidance, just as I should have gone relying upon the half-breeds if you had not been with me. We two are differently built, I tell you. Now, even here at Warlock, I send for Sam when I want my studs changed from one shirt to another, while only this morning you cleaned your own boots rather than wait for Sam after you had whistled for him thrice. I don't think I'm lazier than you are, and I know I'm not more afraid of anything. But you rejoice in toilsome journeys, while I prefer to take them easily, hiring other people to do the hard work. You relish danger just as you do red pepper, while I prefer safety and a less pungent seasoning. Now, young women of our kind and class prefer your kind of man to my kind, and so you are likely to marry, while I am not. Another thing. I saw you throw aside a copy of Shakespeare the other day without even marking your place in the volume, because a company of gentlewomen had driven up to visit your aunt, and you completely forgot your Shakespeare in thinking of the gentlewomen. Now I, in a like case, should have edged a little farther around the tree, read on to the end of the scene, marked my place, and only then have discovered that the gentlewomen had driven up. Women like your ways better than mine, and they are entirely right."

In all this, Marshall Pollard exaggerated somewhat, in playful fashion, and to his own discrediting. But in the main his analysis of the difference between himself and his friend was quite correct.

It was to this friend that Baillie Pegram spoke of the note he had received from The Oaks ladies, saying that it read "like a joint note from the Powers to the Grand Turk."

"Tell me about it," answered Marshall.

"O, read it for yourself," Baillie replied, handing him the sheet. "The stilted ceremoniousness of it," he presently added, "is easy enough to understand, but I can't, for the life of me, see why the good ladies of The Oaks felt it incumbent upon themselves to write to me at all. They are always scrupulously attentive to forms and conventionalities when discharging any obligation of courtesy, and in this case they have had the rather embarrassing duty imposed upon them of telling me not to call upon their niece, who is also their guest. That sufficiently accounts for the stiff formality of their rhetoric, and their scrupulous attention to the niceties of courtesy in the embarrassing case, but –"

"Remember, also," broke in Marshall Pollard, "that they are 'maiden ladies,' while you, my dear, unsuspecting boy, are a particularly marriageable young man."

"Don't talk nonsense, Marshall; this is a serious matter," answered Baillie.

"It isn't nonsense at all that I'm talking," said his friend. "I'm speaking only words of 'truth and soberness.' The Misses Sarah and Jane Ronald, as I understand the matter, are highly bred and blue-bloodedly descended Virginia gentlewomen, who happen to be as yet unmarried. Very naturally and properly they adopt a guarded manner in addressing a missive to a peculiarly marriageable young gentleman like you, lest their intentions be misinterpreted."

"Why, they are old enough," Baillie replied, "to be my grandmothers!"

"True," answered the other, "but you wouldn't venture to suggest that fact to the mind of either of them, would you, Baillie?"

"Certainly not, but – "

"Certainly not. And certainly they in their turn do not give special weight to that fact. When will you learn to understand women a little bit, Baillie? Don't you know that no woman ever thinks of herself as too old or too ugly or too unattractive to fascinate a young man? Especially no well-bred spinster, accustomed to be courted in her youth, and treated with deference in her middle age, ever realises that she is so old as to be privileged to lay aside those reserves with which she was trained in youth to guard her maidenly modesty against the ugly imputation of a desire to 'throw herself at the head' of a young gentleman possessed of good manners, good looks, an old family name, and a plantation of five or six thousand acres? Now, don't let your vanity run away with you, my boy. I do not mean for one moment to suggest that either of The Oaks ladies would think of accepting an offer of marriage from you or anybody else. I am too gallant to imagine that they have not had abundant opportunities of marriage in their day. At the same time, propriety is propriety, you know, and the conduct of an 'unattached female' cannot be too carefully guarded against the possibility of misinterpretation."

Baillie laughed, and presently fell into silence for a space. Finally his companion lazily said:

"It is time for you to be off, if you are going."

"Going where?"

"Why, to dine at The Oaks, of course. You are invited for the third Friday of each month, if I understand the matter correctly, and this is the third Friday of April, I believe."

"Why, so it is. I hadn't thought of the date. By Jove, I'll go! There's just a chance that she hasn't started yet."

"It's awkward, of course," said Pollard, in his meditative, philosophical way, "especially with this war coming on. But these things never will adjust themselves to circumstances in a spirit of rationality and accommodation."

"What on earth do you mean, Marshall? I don't understand."

"Of course not. The bird caught in the net of the fowler does not usually see just what is the matter with him."

"But Marshall – "

"O, I'll explain as well as I can. I mean only that you are in love with Agatha Ronald. Of course you're totally unconscious of your state of mind, but you'll find it out after awhile. It is an utterly irrational state of mind for you to be in, but the malady often takes that form, I believe, and I've done you a service in telling you about it, for as a rule a man never finds out what's the matter with him in such a case until some friend tells him. He just goes on making a fool of himself until somebody else jogs his elbow with information which he alone has need of. Now suppose you tell me all about this case. What is it that stands between you and the young lady?"

Again Baillie laughed. But this time the laugh was accompanied by a tell-tale flushing of the face.

"The whole thing is ridiculous," he presently said. "It couldn't have happened anywhere but in this dear old Virginia of ours. I'll tell you all I know about it. My grandfather whom I never saw in my life, and Miss Agatha Ronald's father, who died before she was born, were friends, like you and me. They owned adjoining plantations, – Warlock and The Oaks, both held by original grants to their great-grandfathers, made in the early colonial times. But the county clerk's office burned up, a generation or two ago, and with it all the records that could show where the boundaries between these two plantations lay. In trying to determine those boundaries one unlucky day, when both had probably taken too much or too little Madeira for dinner, the two irascible old gentlemen fell into a dispute as to where the boundary line should run through a wretched little scrap of ground down there on Nib's Creek, which never had been cultivated, never has been, and never will be. The thing

was not worth a moment's thought in itself, but the gout got into it, or in some other way the two absurd old gentlemen's dignity got itself involved, and so they quarrelled. If there had been time, they would have laughed the thing off presently over a mint-julep. But unhappily one of them died, and that made a permanent family quarrel of the dispute. All the women-kind took it up as an inherited feud, which made it impossible that any Pegram should have aught to do with any Ronald, or any Ronald with any Pegram. So much, it was held, was due to the tender memory of the dead. But, after our Virginian tradition, the individual members of both families have been held bound to treat each other with the extreme of formal but quite unfriendly courtesy. That is why I have been required, from my fifteenth birthday onward, to dine at The Oaks on the third Friday of every month when I happened to be in the county on that day. I had only the vaguest notion of the situation until last Christmas, when circumstances brought it to my attention. Then I made my good Aunt Catherine tell me all about it. When I learned what the matter in dispute was, I sent for the family lawyer, and ordered him to make out a deed to The Oaks ladies, conveying all my right, title, and interest in the disputed piece of land to them 'for and in consideration of the sum of one dollar in hand paid, receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged.' I sent the deed to The Oaks ladies, with a perhaps too effusive note, asking them to accept it as an evidence of my desire to make an end of a quarrel which had long alienated those who should have remained friends."

"What an idiot you made of yourself by doing that!" broke in young Pollard.

"Of course, and I soon found it out. The Oaks ladies wrote that they had never, by any act or word, recognised the existence of a quarrel; that if such quarrel existed, it lay between the dead, who had not authorised them or me to adjust it; and that they, holding only a life interest in The Oaks, by virtue of their 'poor brother's' kindly will, were not authorised either to alienate any part of the fee, or to add to it, by deed of gift or otherwise; that their 'poor brother' had never been accustomed to accept gifts of land or of anything else from others, and finally that they were sure his spirit would not sanction the purchase, for the miserable consideration of one dollar, of a piece of land which, till the time of his death, he had believed to be absolutely his own. There was no use arguing such a case or explaining it. So I have let it rest, and have gone once a month to dine with The Oaks ladies, as a matter of duty. It's all absurd, but – "

"But it interferes with your interest in Miss Agatha," broke in the friend. "Take my advice, and don't let it. Off with you to The Oaks, and ten to one you'll find the young lady still there. The date of her departure was not fixed when this diplomatic note was despatched, and as you were not expected to receive the communication for a week to come, she is probably still there. If so, by the way, please don't mention my presence at Warlock. You see – well, I have met the young lady at her grandfather's, and properly I ought to pay my respects to her, now that she's a guest on a plantation adjoining that on which I am staying. But I don't want to. Your saddle-horses jolt so confoundedly, and besides, I've discovered up-stairs a copy of old T. Gordon's seventeenth century translation of Tacitus, with his essays on that author, and his bitter-tongued comments on all preceding translations of his favourite classic. I want an afternoon with the old boy."

"You certainly are a queer fellow, Marshall," said Baillie.

"How so? Because I like old books? Or is it because I don't like the jolting of your horses?"

"Why haven't you told me that you knew Miss Agatha Ronald?"

"I have told you – within the last minute."

"But why didn't you tell me before?"

"O, well, – perhaps I didn't think of it. Never mind that. It is time for you to be off, unless you want the soup and your welcome to grow cold while waiting for you."

When Baillie had ridden away, Marshall Pollard sat idly for a time in the porch. Then tossing aside the book he had been holding in his hand but not reading, he rose and went to his room. There he searched among his belongings for a little Elzevir volume, and took from between its leaves a sprig of dried yellow jessamine.

"It is a poisonous flower," he said, as he tossed it out of the window. "She warned me of that when I took it from her hand. She was altogether right."

Apparently pursuing a new-born purpose, the young man returned to the porch, broke off a sprig of honeysuckle leaves – for the vine was not yet in flower – and carefully placed it between the pages of the Elzevir.

"The honeysuckle," he said to himself, "is unlike the yellow jessamine. It is sweet and wholesome. So is the friendship of the man from whose vine I have plucked it."

IV

In revolt

When Agatha reached The Oaks, mounted upon Baillie Pegram's mare, her reception at the hands of her aunts was one of almost stunned astonishment. The two good ladies had learned an hour before her coming that she had ridden away alone that morning while yet they had slept, and they had carefully prepared a lecture upon that exceeding impropriety, for delivery on the young woman's return.

But when they saw her dismount from Baillie Pegram's mare, they were well-nigh speechless with horror at her depravity. The deliverance that had been so carefully prepared for her chastening no longer met the requirements of the case. A new and far severer rebuke must be extemporised, and the necessity of that was an additional offence on the part of the young woman who had forced it upon them. They were not accustomed to speak extemporaneously on any subject of importance. To do so involved the danger of saying too much, or saying it less effectively than they wished, or – worse still – leaving unsaid things that they very much wished to say. In response to their horrified questionings, Agatha made the simplest and most direct statement possible.

"The morning was fine, and I wanted to ride. I rode as far as Dogwood Branch. There my poor horse – the one that my grandfather sent down for me to ride while here – met with a mishap. His foot went through a hole in the bridge, and in his struggle to extricate it, he broke his leg. Mr. Pegram came along and released the poor beastie's foot, but it was too late. So he insisted upon my taking his mare, and showed me that I couldn't refuse. He sent his servant to ride on a mule behind me in case I should have trouble with his only partially broken mare. He promised to put my poor horse out of his misery. There. That's all there is to tell."

The little speech was made in a tone and with a manner that suggested difficult self-restraint. When it was ended the two good aunts sat for a full minute looking at the girl with eyes that were eloquent of reproach – a reproach that for the moment could find no fit words for its expression. At last the torrent came – not with a rushing violence of speech, but with a steady, overwhelming flow. The girl stood still, seemingly impassive.

"Will you not be seated?" presently asked Aunt Sarah.

"If you don't mind, I prefer to stand," she answered, in the gentlest, most submissive tone imaginable, for Agatha – angry and outraged – was determined to maintain her self-control to the end. Her gentle submissiveness of seeming deceived her censors to their undoing. Satisfied that they might rebuke her to their hearts' content, they proceeded, adding one word of bitter reproach and condemnation to another, and waxing steadily stronger in their righteous wrath. Still the girl stood like a soldier under a fire which he is forbidden to return. Still she controlled her countenance and restrained herself from speech. Only a slight flushing of the face, and now and then a tremor of the lip, gave indication of emotion of any kind.

Not until the storm had completely expended its wrath upon her head did Agatha Ronald open her lips. Then she spoke as Agatha Ronald:

"Will you please order my carriage to be ready for me on Saturday morning, Aunt Sarah? My maid is too ill to travel to-morrow or the next day. But by Saturday morning she will be well enough, and I shall begin my journey to Willoughby at nine o'clock, if you will kindly order a cup of coffee served half an hour before the usual breakfast-time on Saturday."

She departed instantly from the room, giving no time or opportunity for reply or remonstrance.

"Perhaps we have spoken too severely, Jane," said Aunt Sarah.

Perhaps they had. At any rate, it had been Agatha's purpose to remain a full month longer at The Oaks before beginning the long homeward carriage journey which alone Colonel Archer permitted

to his grandchild. Railroads were new in those days, and Colonel Archer had not reconciled himself to them.

"They are convenient for carrying freight," he said, "but a young lady isn't freight. She should travel in her own carriage."

Later in the day Agatha reappeared, as gentle and smiling as usual, and as attentive as ever to the comfort of her aunts. Her manner was perfect in its docility, for she had decided that so long as she should remain under their roof, it was her duty to herself, and incidentally to her aunts, to minister in every way she could to their pleasure, and to obey their slightest indicated wishes implicitly. They were misled somewhat by her manner, which they construed to be an indication of submission.

"You will surely not think of leaving us on Saturday, dear, now that you have thought the matter over calmly," said Aunt Sarah; "and perhaps we spoke too severely this morning. But you will overlook that, I am sure, in view of the concern we naturally feel for your bringing up."

A bitter and convincing speech was on the girl's lips ready for delivery, – a speech in which she should declare her independence, and assert her right as a woman fully grown to determine her conduct for herself within the limits of perfect innocence, – but she drove it back into her heart, and restrained her utterance to the single sentence:

"I shall begin my journey on Saturday morning."

Agatha Ronald was in revolt against an authority which she deemed oppressive, and such revolt was natural enough on the part of a daughter of Virginia whose ancestry included three signers of the Declaration of Independence, and at least half a dozen fighting soldiers of the Revolution. It was in her blood to resent and resist injustice and to defy the authority that decreed injustice. But after the fashion of those revolutionary ancestors of hers, she would do everything with due attention to "a decent respect for the opinions of mankind." She had decided to quit The Oaks because she could not and would not longer submit to a discipline which she felt to be arbitrary, unreasonable, and unjust. But she was determined to be as gentle and as gentlewomanly as possible in the manner of her leaving. It was her fixed purpose never again to visit that plantation – her birthplace – until she should be summoned thither to take possession as its sole inheritor, but she let slip no hint of this determination to distress her aunts, who, after all, meant only kindness to her by their severity.

"I'll say nothing about it," she resolved. "I'll just go back to Chummie. He understands me, and I'll never leave him again."

V

At the oaks

When Baillie Pegram rode into The Oaks grounds on that third Friday of April, 1861, the first person he encountered was none other than Agatha. She was gowned all in white, except that she had tied a cherry-coloured ribbon about her neck. She was wholly unbonneted, and was armed with a little gardening implement – hoe on one side and miniature rake on the other. She was busy over a flower-bed, and the young man, rounding a curve in the shrubbery, came upon her, to the complete surprise of both.

The situation might have been embarrassing but for the ease and perfect self-possession with which the girl accepted it. She greeted her visitor, to his astonishment, without any of the hauteur that had marked her demeanour on the occasion of their last previous meeting. Here at The Oaks she felt herself under the entirely adequate protection of her aunts. She had therefore no occasion to stand upon the defensive. Out there at the bridge she had been herself solely responsible for her conduct, and dependent upon herself for the maintenance of her dignity. Here Mr. Baillie Pegram was the guest of her people, while out there he had been a person casually and unwillingly encountered, and not on any account to be permitted any liberty of intercourse. Besides all these conclusive differences of circumstance, there was the additional fact that Agatha was in revolt against authority, and very strongly disposed to maintain her perfect freedom of innocent action. So she gave her visitor a garden-gloved hand as he dismounted, and slowly walked with him toward the house.

"I attended an opera once," she chattered, "when I was a very little girl. I remember that I thought the basso a porpoise, and the tenor a conceited popinjay, and the prima donna a fat woman, but I fell completely in love with the haymakers in the chorus. So whenever I go gardening I find myself instinctively trying to make myself look as like them as I can. That, I suppose, is why I tied a red ribbon about my neck this morning."

Here Baillie Pegram missed an opportunity to make a particularly gallant and flattering speech. To any other woman, under like circumstances, he would have said something of her success in making a charmingly attractive picture of herself. But there was much of reverence in his admiration for Agatha, and he felt that a merely complimentary speech addressed to her would be a frivolous impertinence. So instead he asked:

"Do you often go out gardening?"

"O, yes, always when the weather permits, and sometimes when it forbids. At Willoughby I've often gone out in a waterproof to train my flowers and vines. I'm just going away from The Oaks, and I've been digging up a hideously formal bed which the gardener's soul delights in, and sowing mixed portulaca instead of the priggish plants. Portulaca smiles at you, you know, when you get up soon enough in the morning to see it in its glory. But I'll never see the smiles in this case."

"But why not?"

"Why, I'm leaving The Oaks on Saturday, you know, – or rather you do not know, – and I'm not coming back for a long, long time."

"May I again presume to ask why not?"

"O, well, I must go to my grandfather. If I don't he'll enlist or join a company, or get a commission, or whatever else it is that a man does when he makes a soldier out of himself. You see I'm the only person who can manage my grandfather."

"But surely, at his age –"

"O, yes, I know. He's over eighty now, but you don't know him very well, or you'd understand. He was a soldier under Jackson at New Orleans, and a colonel in the Mexican War, and he'll go into this war, too, if I don't go home and tell him he mustn't. I'm going to-morrow morning."

Manifestly the girl wanted to chatter. Women often do that when they are anxious to avoid serious conversation. If men never do it, it is only because they lack the intellectual alertness necessary. They hem and haw, and make stupid remarks about the weather instead, and succeed only in emphasising the embarrassment which a woman would completely bury under charming chatter.

"You haven't seen my aunts yet, I suppose?" Miss Agatha presently asked.

"No. I'm just arriving at The Oaks. I dine here, you know, on the third Friday of every month."

"Yes – so I've heard. I don't think the aunties expected you to-day. They'll be glad to see you, of course, but I think they thought you were still in Richmond."

Baillie wondered if this was a covert rebuke to him for having ventured upon the premises while Agatha was still there. The girl was not altogether an easy person to understand. In any case her remark revealed the fact that the question of his coming had been discussed in the house and decided in the negative. It was with some embarrassment, therefore, that he presented himself to those formidable personages, The Oaks ladies, and tried to treat his own coming quite as a matter of course. But if his presence was in any wise unwelcome to them, there was nothing in their demeanour to suggest the fact. They expressed no surprise whatever, and only a placid, well-bred self-congratulation that absence had not deprived them of the pleasure of his company at dinner, as they had feared that it might. Then one of them added:

"It is unfortunate that Agatha is to dine at The Forest to-day, with our cousins, the Misses Blair. By the way," tinkling a bell, "it is time to order the carriage, and for you to change your gown, Agatha, dear."

Baillie Pegram happened to catch sight of the young girl's face as these words were spoken, and he read there enough of surprise to convince him that if it had been previously arranged for her to drive to The Forest for dinner, she at least had heard nothing of the matter until now. But whether the surprise reflected in her face was one of pleasure or the reverse, she gave him no chance to guess. She merely glanced at the tall and slowly ticking clock, and said:

"I'll go at once, auntie. I did not know it was so late. Excuse the abruptness of my leave-taking, Mr. Pegram, and let me say good-bye, for I leave for Willoughby to-morrow morning."

It was all an admirable bit of acting – the more admirable, Baillie thought, for the reason that the scene had been suddenly extemporised and not rehearsed – for he was satisfied that Agatha at least had been completely surprised by the announcement that she was to dine at The Forest that day.

Unfortunately the acting was destined to be wasted, for almost immediately after Agatha's departure for her chamber, a carriage drove up, and Baillie gallantly assisted Miss Blair herself to alight from it. She greeted her cousins of The Oaks effusively in the ceaseless speech with which it was her practice to meet and greet her friends.

"Isn't it good of me, Cousin Sarah and Cousin Jane? I had a positive headache to-day, but I was determined to drive over and dine with you, so as to bid Agatha good-bye. Where is the dear child? You see we heard only this morning that she had changed her plans and was going to leave us to-morrow. So I just had to come and dine" – and so forth, through a speech that fortunately gave The Oaks ladies time a-plenty in which to collect their wits and avoid all appearance of discomfiture.

"You are always so good and thoughtful," said Miss Sarah, as soon as Miss Blair left a little hole in her conversation. "We knew you'd want to see Agatha before she left, and we were just planning to send her to you for dinner. In fact she's gone up to dress. But this is so much better, particularly as we have Mr. Baillie Pegram with us, too. This is his regular day, you know, and he is always so mindful of his engagements. We had feared we should miss seeing him to-day, as he was away in Richmond; but he got home in time, and he never fails us when within reach. He has an admirable habit of punctuality which the other young men of our rather lax time might emulate with advantage."

Here was Baillie Pegram's opportunity, but he missed it. If he had possessed one-half or one-tenth the tact that Agatha had shown fifteen minutes before, he would have protested that, much to his regret, he could not remain to dinner that day, as he had a guest of his own at Warlock, and had

ridden over only to make his apologies and express his regret. But Baillie Pegram, not being a woman, did not think of the right thing to say until it was one full minute too late, wherefore, of course, it would not do for him to say it at all.

What a pity it is that men can't be women – sometimes! Just for lack of that tact which is instinctive in a woman, the master of Warlock was doomed to dine that day under a sense of intrusion on his part, which certainly did not contribute to his enjoyment of the dinner or the company. But he had only himself to blame, and, like the resolute fellow that he was, he determined to bear the consequences of his blundering stupidity with the best grace he could. He professed the keenest delight in the unexpected pleasure of having Miss Blair for his fellow guest, adding, with an obeisance to The Oaks ladies, "Though of course one needs no other company than that of our hostesses themselves, to make the day of a dinner at The Oaks altogether delightful."

Obviously the young man was improving in tactfulness under the stimulus of circumstances.

When dinner was served half an hour later, he gave his arm to Miss Sarah, and entered the stately but gloomy old dining-room, with its high-backed, carved mahogany chairs, its stained-glass cathedral windows, and its general atmosphere of solemnity and depression, with such grace as a resolute spirit could command. He managed to taste the dishes as they were served, and to carve without a mishap of any kind, but in the matter of conversation he was certainly not brilliant, though he had the approaching war for his theme.

After the old English custom which survived in Virginia, the wine – a rich old Madeira – was not served until the dessert was removed. Then it came on with the cigars. The ladies sipped a single glass each, and rose, whereupon the young man gallantly held open the great door, bowing as the womankind took their departure.

When they had gone, there being no gentleman present except himself, young Pegram was left alone with the wine, the cigars, a single wax candle for cigar-lighting purposes, – and Henry. Henry was the perfectly trained butler of the establishment, a butler taught from childhood, by his late master, to comport himself always with the dignity of a diplomat who has dined. He stood bolt upright behind the young man's chair, eager to anticipate every want, and anticipating them all without a false movement or any suggestion of hurry. Henry had presided as butler in his late master's establishment when that master kept "open house" as a distinguished senator in Washington, and it was the serving-man's boast that he "knew what a gentleman wants and when he wants it."

But Henry's very propriety became irksome to Baillie Pegram presently. It reminded him of his own lack of any ease except a forcibly assumed one. "Henry feels himself in his proper place," the young man reflected. "I do not."

It was not the young man's habit to take more than a glass or two of wine after dinner, and on this occasion he had no relish even for that small allowance. Yet he sat with it for a sufficient time to show proper respect for the hospitality of the house. He held his glass up between him and the stained-glass windows, and went through all the motions of watching the play of colours through the amber liquid, quite as if his relish for it had been that of a confirmed *bon vivant*. Finally he lighted a fresh cigar, and said to Henry: "It is quite warm. I think I'll finish my cigar out among the shrubbery. Please say to the ladies that I'll join them within half an hour."

He was not destined, however, to fulfil this promise. For, as he passed out into the shrubbery, he encountered Miss Agatha by an accident which that young lady had in all probability arranged with the utmost care, as women do sometimes. She very much wanted speech with Baillie.

"I want to thank you, Mr. Pegram," she said, eagerly, "for not making a scene. It was very hard on you – the situation, I mean – and you have spared me at every point. Perhaps you had better take your leave now as quickly as you can."

But the young man's courage had completely come back to him, with something of the dare-devil spirit added to it: as the soldier beset, sometimes comes to relish danger for its own sake, and deliberately invites more of it, so Baillie Pegram, knowing perfectly that he had completely outraged

the proprieties, as The Oaks ladies interpreted them, was minded to outrage them still further. Having braved the situation to this point, he was determined to brave it out to the end – whatever the end might be. So to the girl's suggestion, he answered:

"But the day is not over yet, and the piazzas of The Oaks fortunately include one with a western aspect. Let us sit there and enjoy the sunset. We'll join the ladies later."

The girl consented, willingly enough. She was already in revolt, for one thing, and she knew that her aunts would not venture again to censure her severely, after what had happened.

"But you must not misunderstand me, Mr. Pegram," she said, as the two seated themselves in the great oaken chairs fabricated on the plantation during colonial times. "I have declared my independence so far as to insist upon my right to treat you with courtesy upon occasion. But you must not suppose that I have forgotten the gulf that lies between us, and especially you must not interpret my attitude to mean that I am disloyal to the memory of my poor father."

"I quite understand," he answered, meditatively and sadly. "You and I are privileged, by your good pleasure, to treat each other with formal courtesy, but I must not in any way presume upon that privilege beyond its intention."

The girl sat silent, looking wistfully out into the glow that had followed the sunset. Finally she said:

"I suppose that is it. It is a hard situation to deal with – for me."

"And for me," the youth replied.

"Yes, for you, too, I suppose. But neither of us is responsible. We must recognise conditions and do the best we can."

"I quite understand. You give me leave hereafter to behave like a gentleman toward you, whenever circumstances shall happen to force any sort of intercourse upon us; but beyond that you remind me that there is war between your house and mine, and between me and thee. It is not a treaty of peace that you offer, or even a protocol looking to peace; it is only an amenity of war, like a cartel for the exchange of prisoners, or a temporary truce, for the burial of the dead who have fallen between the lines."

This statement of the case did not at all satisfy the bewildered girl's mind, but there was no opportunity to correct it, for at that moment a maid came with a formally polite message to the effect that if Mr. Pegram and Miss Ronald had *quite* finished their conversation in the porch, the Misses Ronald and Miss Blair were waiting to receive them in the library.

"After all," Agatha thought, afterward, "I do not know that I could have bettered his definition of the situation. But it isn't one that I like."

All skies seemed serene as the two miscreants entered the library, Baillie making all that was necessary of apology by saying:

"Pardon us, good ladies, I pray you. We have lingered too long in the porch, but you will graciously attribute our fault to the unusual beauty of the sunset. Sunsets mean so much, you know. They suggest the end of pleasant things and the coming of a darkness to which we do not know the dawn. I cannot help thinking that the sunset that Miss Ronald and I have been witnessing is typical. Our beautiful Virginia life is at its sunset. A night-time of war and suffering is approaching, and we cannot know of the day that must follow."

At this point Miss Blair relieved the situation by giving the conversation a thoroughly practical and commonplace turn.

"Why, Mr. Pegram," she exclaimed, "you surely do not doubt the outcome of the war? You confidently expect the triumph of our righteous cause?"

"Well, I hope for it. But the size and the number of the guns will have something to do with the result, and our enemies can put four or five men and four or five guns to our one in the field. It is a dark night that must follow our sunset. We can only do our best, and leave the result to God."

Ladies, I bid you good night, and good-bye; for I fear I shall see none of you again soon. I shall be off soldiering almost at once."

VI

Next morning

If Baillie Pegram imagined that by his parting words he had silenced the batteries of The Oaks ladies, he totally misjudged his enemy. For in spite of his intimation of intent not to dine at The Oaks again, there came to him at breakfast the next morning a little note in which the good ladies calmly reasserted their privilege of deciding such matters for themselves quite irrespective of the wishes or purposes of young persons of whatever sex or degree.

"The Misses Ronald present their respectful compliments to Mr. Baillie Pegram," the note ran, "and beg to say that in view of the terribly disturbed condition of the times, it is their purpose presently to close The Oaks for a season, so far at least as the entertainment of guests is concerned. They may perhaps go upon a journey. As to that, their plans are as yet unformed, but at any rate it is their purpose not to entertain again for the present, except by special invitation to their nearest intimates. They feel it incumbent upon them to give timely notice of this alteration in the customs of their house to those valued friends who, like Mr. Pegram, have been accustomed to dine at The Oaks at stated intervals.

"With sincere good wishes for Mr. Pegram's safety and good fortune in that soldierly career to which he feels himself summoned by the circumstances of the time, and in full confidence that he is destined to win for himself the laurels that befit one of his distinguished ancestry, The Oaks ladies remain,

"Most respectfully,
"SARAH RONALD,
"JANE RONALD."

Having read the joint note, Baillie passed it to his friend at the other end of the breakfast-table, saying: "Read that, old fellow, and see what has come of following your madcap advice."

Pollard carefully read the letter through, and then asked:

"Well, what of it?"

"Why, don't you see, by going to The Oaks yesterday as you advised, I've managed to get myself forbidden the house."

"Well, what of that? I don't understand that you have any passionate desire to dine with the estimable old ladies every month, and I think you told me last night, when I was trying to get a nap, that Miss Agatha is leaving this morning."

"Yes, of course. But can't you understand that it's a disagreeable and humiliating thing thus to be forbidden the house, just as if I were guilty of some misconduct – "

"O, yes, I understand perfectly. It is exceedingly inconvenient to find yourself at odds with the elderly female relatives of a young gentlewoman to whom you would very much like to pay your addresses. But in this case, I do not see that it complicates matters very much, as you told me yourself yesterday that the case is hopeless – that there is already an impassable barrier between yourself and Miss Agatha Ronald, so what difference does it make? When you've a ten-rail staked and ridered fence in front of you, a rail more or less doesn't signify much. I'll tell you, Baillie, you must do as I've done. In view of the chances of war, which are apt to worry one who thinks much about them, I have decided to accept and believe the fatalistic philosophy, which teaches that what is to be will be, even if it never happens."

Pegram sat silent for a while before answering. Then he said:

"Be serious for a little if you can, Pollard, I want to talk with you. You were right after all in what you said to me yesterday, though at the time I regarded it as unutterable nonsense. It seems

absurd, under the circumstances, but the fact is that – well, that Agatha Ronald has somehow come to mean more to me than any other woman ever did or ever will. Perhaps I shouldn't have found out the fact for a long time to come, if it hadn't been for what you said to me yesterday. But I've found it out now, and I know all that it means to me. It means that I've made a fool of myself, and I must set to work to repair the mistake. Fortunately, the way is open, and that is what I want to say to you. I'm going to leave you to-day. I'm going to Richmond to volunteer in one of the batteries there that are already organised, armed, and equipped, and nearly ready for the field. They'll be the first sent to the front, and I intend to put myself at the front just as speedily as I can."

"But why not do better than that for yourself?" asked Pollard.

"What better is there that I can do?"

"Why not raise a battery of your own, and command it? You know Governor Letcher, and you have influence in plenty. You can have a captain's commission for the asking."

"I suppose I might. But I am strongly impressed with the fact that there are altogether too many men in like predicament – too many men whose position and influence entitle them to expect commissions while, like me, they know nothing whatever of the military art. We need some privates in this war, and fortunately a good many of us are willing to serve as such. I am, for one. The number of gentlemen in Virginia whose position is as good as my own is quite great enough to officer any army in Europe, and our ignorance of military affairs is great enough to wreck the best army that was ever organised. I'll not add mine to the list. I'll go in as a private soldier. If I am ever fit to command, it will be time enough then for me to ask for a commission. I'm going to volunteer in the ranks."

"So am I," answered Pollard.

"What? You? When?"

"Yes. Me. Yesterday."

"Well, go on. Don't be provoking. Tell me all about it. When did you do it, and how, and why? For a generally agreeable young man, I must say, Marshall, you can make of yourself about as disagreeable a person as I ever encountered. Come! Tell me!"

Pollard smiled and meditated, as if planning the order of his utterance. At last he said:

"There isn't much to tell, and I don't know just where to begin. But after – well, after you rode away to The Oaks yesterday, I got to thinking and wondering what I should do with myself now that your companionship was lost to me. There is nobody about for me to fall in love with, and after all, there is a limit to the entertainment to be got out of old T. Gordon and his Tacitus. You see, girls never behave properly toward me. There isn't one of them in ten counties who would ever think of breaking her horse's leg in a bridge just in time to let me come to her rescue. Besides, I should probably be on foot, with no mare to lend the distressed damsel, and, altogether, you see –"

"Will you stop your nonsense, or will you not?" asked Baillie, with impatience. "Tell me what you did."

"Well, I got Sam to bring me the least objectionable of your abominably jolting saddle-horses – the bay with three white feet and a blaze on the face – and I managed to keep a little breath in my body while riding over to the Court-house. It was my purpose to go to Richmond, and I asked the old ticket agent to send me, but he obstinately refused. He said there were only two trains a day, one at noon and one at midnight. I remonstrated with him, but it was of no use. I explained to him that the *raison d'être* of a railroad – I translated the French to him – was to carry people to whatever place they wished to go to, and at such hours as might suit their convenience. I told him it was an abominable outrage that with a railroad lying there unused, he would not send a gentleman to Richmond without making him wait for eight or ten hours for the convenience of people whom he knew nothing about. He looked at me rather curiously when I urged that consideration upon him. I think it rather staggered him, but he persisted in his obstinate refusal to send me to Richmond without further delay. He even suggested that I might go somewhere else, but I interpreted that as meaningless profanity, and gently explained to him that I did not wish to go to the place he had mentioned. Then he told me he had

no train, and I asked him why he suffered himself to have no train, when a gentleman wanted one and was willing to pay for it."

"Will you stop your nonsense, and tell me what happened?" interrupted Baillie.

Pollard smiled, and continued:

"Now, that question of yours reassures me as to the sanity of the station agent. It is closely similar to the question he asked, only, by reason of his lack of cultivation, he interrupted the even and orderly flow of his English with many objurgative and even violent terms, such as we do not employ in ordinary converse, but such as stablemen and innkeepers seem to like to use.

"Despairing of my efforts to secure reasonable public service at the hands of the railroad, I looked about me, and presently encountered Captain Skinner. You know him, of course – lives at the Kennels, or some such place – keeps a lot of dogs, and drinks a good deal more whiskey than would be good for most men. But he is a West Pointer, you know, and served for a considerable time in the Indian wars. He was at Chapultepec, too, I think. At any rate, he mentioned the fact in connection with his missing arm. He told me he was going to raise a battery in the purlieu of Richmond. He said he didn't want a company of young bloods, but one of soldiers. He proposes to enlist wharf-rats down at Rockett's, and ruffians, and especially jailbirds. 'There are more than a hundred as good men as ever smelt gunpowder or stopped a bullet in its career,' he said, 'now languishing in the Richmond jails and the Virginia State Penitentiary. Governor Letcher promises me that he will pardon all of them who choose to enlist with me, and I'm going to look them over. Those that are fit to make soldiers of, I'll enlist, and after a week or two of drilling I'll have a battery ready for the field.'

"His idea pleased me, so I told him to put me down as the first man on his list. He objected at first. You see, I've had no experience as a ruffian, and I never served a term in jail in my life, but I convinced him that I would make a good cannonier, and he enrolled me. I am to report to him at Rockett's by the day after to-morrow."

To Baillie's remonstrances and pleadings that his friend should choose a company of gentlemen in which to serve, Marshall turned a deaf ear.

"When I become a soldier," he said, "and put myself under another man's command, I want that other man to be one who knows something about the business. Captain Skinner knows what to do with a gun and a gunner, and I've a pretty well-defined notion that most of our coming captains have all that yet to learn, and besides – well, I've given you reasons enough."

"Besides what, Marshall? What were you going to say?"

"O, nothing that you would understand or sympathise with. It's only that somehow I don't want to be in a company of gentlemen turned soldiers, where I should be sure to meet our kind of people on terms of social equality now and then. As a common soldier, I should find it rather embarrassing at a military ball to have a lady put me on her dancing-list while scornfully refusing a like favour perhaps to the officer who must assign me to guard-duty next morning."

In thus answering, Marshall Pollard equivocated somewhat. He made no mention of the little jessamine and honeysuckle incident, but perhaps there was something behind that which helped to determine his course in choosing Captain Skinner's company for his own, thus placing himself among men wholly without the pale of that society in which sprigs of jessamine are given and cherished, and now and then thrown out of the window. At any rate, the young man seemed disposed to change the course of the conversation.

"Now, Baillie," he said, "you've catechised me quite enough for one morning. Tell me about yourself. Why are you going off to Richmond to enlist in one of the batteries there, instead of joining your neighbours and friends here in organising one or other of the companies they are forming?"

"For the simple reason that I want to be in the middle of this mix as soon as possible. Those Richmond batteries are already fit to take the field, and they'll be hurling shells at the enemy and dodging shells on their own account before these companies here learn which way a sergeant's chevrons should point. I want to get to the front among the first, that's all."

Sending for Sam, he bade that worthy pack a small saddle valise for him with a few belongings, and when, an hour later, the two friends were ready for their departure, Sam presented himself, clad in his best, and carrying a multitudinous collection of skillets, kettles, and frying-pans, with other and less soldierly belongings. When asked by his master, "What does this mean?" Sam answered, in seeming astonishment at the question:

"Why, Mas' Baillie, you'se a-gwine to de wah, an' of co'se Sam's a-gwine along to take k'yar o' you."

"Of course Sam is going to do no such thing," answered the young man. "Go and put away your pots and pans."

"But, Mas' Baillie," remonstrated the negro boy, in a nearly tearful voice, "who's a-gwine to take k'yar o' you ef Sam ain't thar? Whose a-gwine to clean yer boots, an' bresh yer clo'se, an' cook yer victuals, an' all that?"

The master was touched by the boy's devotion, though he justly suspected that a yearning for adventure had quite as much to do with Sam's wish to "go to de wah," as his desire to be of service to a kindly master.

"But, Sam," he said, "a common soldier doesn't carry his personal servant with him. If we did that, there wouldn't be enough – "

"A common soldier!" Sam broke in, exercising that privilege of interrupting his master's speech which the personal servants of Virginians always claimed for their own. "A common soldier! Who says Mas' Baillie'll be a common soldier? De mastah of Warlock ain't a common nuffin'. He's a Pegram, he is, an' de Pegrams ain't never been common yit, an' dey ain't a-gwine to be."

"But, Sam," argued his master, "you see we're all going to war. We can't carry our servants with us any more than we can carry our feather beds or our foot-tubs. We must do things for ourselves, now."

"But who's a-gwine to cook your victuals, Mas' Baillie?"

"I reckon I'll have to do that for myself," answered the master.

"What? You? Mas' Baillie Pegram a-gittin' down on his knees in de mud an' a-smuttin' up of his han's an' his face, an' a-wrastlin' with pots an' kittles? Well, I'd jes' like to see you a-doin' of that!"

Baillie was disposed to amuse himself with the boy; so he said:

"But your mammy says you don't know how to cook, Sam, and that you don't seem to know how to learn."

This staggered Sam for an instant, but he promptly rose to the emergency.

"I kin 'splain all dat, Mas' Baillie. You see, I'se done been a-foolin' o' mammy. Mammy, she's de head cook at Warlock; she's a-gittin' old, an' de rheumatiz an' de laziness is a-gittin' into her bones. So she's done tried to make Sam take things offen her shoulders. But I'se done see de situation. I'se watched mammy so long dat I kin cook anything from a Brunswick stew to an omelette sufferin', jes' as good as mammy kin. But it 'ud never 'a' done to let her know that, else she'd 'a' shouldered the whole thing onter Sam. So when she done set me to watch somethin' she's a-cookin' while she's busy with somethin' else, I jes' had to let it spile some way, in self-defence. Of co'se, I had to run out'n de kitchen after that, a-dodgin' o' de pots an' kittles mammy throwed at my head – an' sometimes I didn't dodge quick enough, either – but de result was de same. Mammy was sure I couldn't cook, an' dat's what she done tole you, Mas' Baillie. But I kin cook, sho'. An' please, Mas' Baillie, you'll let me go 'long wid you?"

The time was growing short now, and Baillie sent the boy away, saying:

"If I ever get to be an officer, Sam, and am allowed a servant, I'll send for you. But you'd better learn all you can about cooking while we're waiting for that."

Sam was disconsolate. He went to the detached kitchen building – for no Virginian ever suffered cooking to be carried on within fifty feet of his dwelling – and sat down and buried his face in his hands and rocked himself backward and forward, moaning dismally.

"I'd jes' like to know," he muttered to the pickaninnies, standing by in their simple costume of long shirts and nothing else, "I'd jes' like to know what's a-gwine to become o' dis here Warlock plantation an' dese here niggas, now dat Mas' Baillie's done gone off to git hisself killed in de wah. De chinch-bug is a-gwine to eat de wheat dis summer sho'. De watermillions is a-gwine to run all to vines. De 'bacca worms an' de grasshoppas is a-gwine to chew up all de terbacca befo' men gits a chawnce at it. De crows is a-gwine to pull up all de cawn – an' dey might as well, too, fer ef dey didn't, it 'ud wither in de rows. Don't yer understan', you stupid little niggas, you'se a-gwine to stawve to death, you is, an' you better believe it. Mas' Baillie's done gone to git hisself killed, I tells you, an' you'se got a mighty short time till yer stomicks gits empty an' shet up an' crampy like. You'se a-gwine to stawve to death, sho', an' it'll hurt wus'n as ef you'd a-swallowed a quart o' black cherries 'thout swallerin' none o' de seeds fer safety."

By this time all the young negroes were wailing bitterly, and they would not be comforted until Sam's mammy set out a kettle of pot-liquor, and gave them pones of ash-cake to crumble into it. After that, Sam's prophecies of evil departed from their inconstant minds. But Sam did not recover so quickly. For days afterward he moped in melancholy, occasionally stretching his big eyes to their utmost while he solemnly delivered some dismal prophecy of evil to come.

VII

A farewell at the gate

When the two friends reached the outer gates of Warlock plantation on their way to the Courthouse, Marshall, to whose queer ways his friend was thoroughly well used, called a halt.

"Let us dismount," he said, "and consider what we are doing."

When they had seated themselves upon the carpet of pine-needles, the meditative youth resumed:

"Does it occur to you, Baillie," he asked, "that when you and I pass through yonder gate, we shall leave behind us for ever the most enjoyable life that it ever fell to the lot of human beings to lead? Do you realise that we may never either of us come back through that gate again, and that if we do, it will only be to find all things changed? We are at the end of a chapter. The next chapter will be by no means like unto it."

"I confess I don't quite understand," answered the less meditative one.

"Well, this easy-going, delightful Virginian life of ours has no counterpart anywhere on this continent or elsewhere in the world, and we have decided to put an end to it. For this war is going to be a very serious thing to us Virginians. Virginia is destined to be the battle-field. Greater armies than have ever before been dreamed of on this continent are going to trample over her fields, and meet in dreadful conflict on the margins of her watercourses. Her homes are going to be desolated, her fields laid waste, her substance utterly exhausted, and her people reduced to poverty in a cause that is not her own, and in behalf of which she unselfishly risks all for the sake of an abstraction, and in defence of a right on the part of other States which Virginia herself had seen no occasion to assert in her own defence. Whatever else happens in this war, all that is characteristic in Virginian life, all that is peculiar to it, all that lends loveliness to it, must be sacrificed on the altar of duty.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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