

yet like many a more complex mystery, to be interpreted only by the heart. Gopi, whose mind was a confusion of piety and mystic meanings, leading, however, in their circuitous way, to the old and tremendous crucifixion of Self.

In "The Squaring of the Gods" there is some of the most impassioned description that Mrs. Steele has ever done, especially that of Benares.

. . . The strangest, saddest city on God's earth. . . The only city in the world whose every stone tells of that search after righteousness which lies so close to the heart of humanity. . . Benares, with its sunless alleys full of the perfume of dead flowers and spent incense—alleys which thread their way past shrine after shrine. . . Niches in stone, or only the bare imprint of a bloody hand on the tall, blank walls. . . It lay this night along the outward curve of the Ganges, dreamful exceedingly, dimly paler than the sky. . . A face or two, patient, dark, turned to the bridge, and another voice came, calm and impassive. . . "Tis easier for folk to find salvation with rails and bridges than, as of old, with blistered feet and boats."

Mrs. Steele's novels might be called Novels of Place, for at times the overwhelming feeling for the country and the tendency to describe at length subordinates the story she is telling. Therefore, in her longer books there is often a total lack of sequence in development of plot, or the interweaving of her incident. The habit of breaking off at the close of a chapter to take up a wholly different thread in the next becomes maddening to the reader's mind, and leaves a sensation of progress made by climbing three steps to fall back two. But the author possesses that which is lacking in many novelists who have a more scientific grasp upon construction—a rich and abundant store of exciting incident and imaginative action. No one can read *The Hosts of the Lord* without perceiving that the author's strength lies first in description, which is full of poetic colour, and, secondly, that her grasp in story telling is on the immediate scene. It is when the subject is lengthily sustained that the constructive faculty weakens.

The gift of short-story telling—which was in its primeval day nothing less than minstrelsy—is based upon one of the

most vital attributes which concern the human mind, namely, "grasp" or proportion, that which many term "a knowledge of values." The mind with a fine sense of proportion will instinctively unify time, place and action in a narrative, and this very unification of the essentials of dramatic construction will tell the story tersely and immediately.

This, Mrs. Steele shows in her handling of incident, and reveals wherein her true strength lies; it is in the short story. Those of *In the Guardianship of God* are by no means tales of "Edens newly made," for the subjects are tragic in their hard facts, and some of them neutral-hued with dull sadness; but—just as in the author's preceding books—one may perceive through the medium of an enlightened vision the world of strange meanings which lies behind that wall of materialism with which the modern mind is prone to surround the one-fifth of the human race whose records date for three thousand years. True, it is a race which expresses itself in a confusion of tongues, a periodic plague, a mass of unintelligibility to the Anglo-Saxon sense, and which bears the national hall-mark of a wholly illogical mind; but happily Mrs. Steele has seen the "other side" through the lens of sympathy, which "liveth, learning whence woe springs."

*Virginia Woodward Cloud.*

## IX.

MEREDITH NICHOLSON'S "THE MAIN CHANCE."\*

It is rather a representative group of people that Mr. Nicholson has brought together in this story of a Western city. And the city itself, as he paints it, a growing railroad centre in the valley of the Missouri, is very typical of its class—very crude, very unbeautiful, very pretentious, but a pretty good place to live in, after all. No one who has mixed in that life could fail to recognise William Porter, the president of the Clarkson National Bank; a cautious, shrewd man, but with all his shrewdness full of those

\*The Main Chance. By Meredith Nicholson. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company. \$1.50.

curious little personal vanities and narrownesses which so often characterise the provincial financier—and spoil him for a wider orbit. Porter's daughter, Evelyn, is the heroine of the book, but not, to tell the truth, a very effective one. Evelyn has been to college, a fact which distinguishes her from the majority of the Clarkson girls, and finding on her return home that her old friends are disposed to regard her with a good deal of awe, she sets herself to convince them that she is nothing but an ordinary girl, after all—a thing of which she amply convinces the reader of *The Main Chance!* Neither is the hero of the tale a character one is likely to remember long. John Saxton is a Boston man, who has failed conspicuously at ranching in Wyoming and has been sent to Clarkson by some Eastern friends—more because they were sorry for him than anything else—to take charge of some properties they supposed to be worthless. He is a lovable fellow, this modest, quiet man who “received kindnesses so shyly, as if, of course, they could not be meant for him, but it was all right, anyway, and he would move on just as soon as the other fellow came;” one likes him and is glad when his industry brings him success; but simple goodness is not a quality that makes for interest in novels.

Mr. Nicholson has shown more skill in his portrayal of James Wheaton, cashier of the Clarkson bank, and the villain of the book. He is a villain of mild quality, whose ill-doing has its root in the purely negative trait of cowardice, but such subtlety as the book displays is centred in the study of his character. One can understand the shrinking with which the reserved, ambitious man who has attained with such difficulty a foothold in the business and social life of Clarkson looks back on the sordid little home in the obscure Ohio village, from which he and his brother had run away as lads to commence a tramping career through the West. Even at that early stage James Wheaton's cowardice had manifested itself; he had permitted his brother to take the blame and to “do time” for a small theft in which the two were concerned. The brother had emerged from jail a

confirmed ne'er-do-weel, and it became the chief object of James, who meantime secured a place in the Bank of Clarkson, whither he had drifted, and began his fight for success with that desperate regard for respectability which really dominated his small nature to conceal the existence of his disreputable relative from his world. It is by means of his knowledge of this brother that Timothy Margrave, Porter's enemy in financial matters, makes Wheaton his tool, though Wheaton loves Porter's daughter and is anxious to keep faith with his chief. And it is Wheaton's silence concerning a crime his brother commits later that indirectly causes the tragedy of the tale, the murder of Warrick Raridon, most lovable and beloved of Clarkson's young people. The climax is well managed, but it seems, somehow, to lack effectiveness; and, indeed, that is the defect throughout the book. Hough and a few other writers have taught us to expect a certain largeness, an epic quality, and also unlimited picturesqueness in all stories of the West; it is precisely these things one misses in *The Main Chance*—in the manner rather than in the matter. Clarkson and its people are representative enough, so much so that one cannot quite understand when one has finished reading its history why said history is as tame as the annals of a New Jersey village.

But one family in *The Main Chance* is a joy, and most readers, we fancy, will regret that the author has not given more space to the Margraves. Tim Margrave, the street-car potentate, plethoric in purse and in person, vulgar and ignorant, but possessed of the qualities that make unerringly for success, is drawn with no little spirit, and what humour the book possesses shows in his conversation. And the one glimpse we have into his home, with its job-lot “library” and its other evidences of the advance of culture in the West, makes us wish for more. The aspiring Miss Mabel Margrave is much more interesting than the retiring Evelyn Porter, and altogether, as not infrequently happens in novels, these minor characters furnish more entertainment than those who occupy chief place.

Eleanor Booth Simmons.



# Tangle-Town

By Grace Denio Litchfield

"How much farther to Tangle-Town now, Mr. Hurd?"

"The matter of a half mile or so," the farmer replied, flicking the loose reins on the horses' backs. "Get up there! Are you tired? You're none too strong yet, I reckon."

"I will not admit that I am tired," the younger man said, taking off his straw hat to pass his hand slowly over his head. "This air is champagne. Still, it is a goodish pull up from Millbrook at the end of a day's journey. Shall we come in sight of Tangle-Town soon?"

"Well, no. You don't see the town from the road. In fact, there ain't any road there—leastways none that counts. There's a new road now."

"No road there, and a new road?" queried Thorpe Merrick. "How is that? Don't you live in Tangle-Town?"

"I do to be sure, though not just to say so. Truth is, there ain't anybody lived in Tangle-Town this forty year," answered the old man with slow emphasis. "Dr. Braunlich didn't tell you about it, eh?"

"What should he have told me? He said if I wanted unparalleled air, country food, absolute quiet—in short, everything to brace me up again, I would better write to see if you could take me in. Seems to me he said he spent a day or so here once. Came up to attend your wife—wasn't that it?"

"So he did," said Mr. Hurd, stroking his lean chin in a reminiscent way. "Martha was right down sick, and by luck I heard there was a swell city doctor stopping at Millbrook. So I fetched him up, and he straightened her out less than no time. He wouldn't take a fee, neither—said he never physicked for pay in his holidays. I've sent him a tub of our best butter every year regular since. 'Twas

all along of his sending you we took you in. We ain't no boarding-house keepers, Martha and I. We ain't got no call to be. To be sure we've Miss Ingram. But that's different."

"Miss Ingram? I thought I was to be the only boarder."

"Well, she's a young woman come up to us once out of Millbrook, when a fever broke out in the summer houses there. My wife and I we just took to her like she was our own, and she says she never forgot us, nor the place neither. Her brother's folks have gone travelling this year, and nothing would do her but she must come to us, and her little niece along of her. Mighty lucky for you you're a married man. Martha she wouldn't have had you on no account if you weren't—not while Miss Ingram's here."

Thorpe's brown eyes twinkled.

"Best set me down somewhere else. I wouldn't interfere with Miss Ingram for worlds."

"Oh, dear no!" responded Mr. Hurd heartily. "You can come right along now. The man who's got a wife already is safe not to go a-courting, and you two will just be fit company for each other. You see there ain't anybody up here but ourselves and the farm hands, except Johnson's and Briggs's folks, and their farms is a good bit away."

"Don't the villagers count?"

"Laws, there's no villagers. There's nothing but the town."

"And where are the town's people?"

"Lord knows."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, you see it's this way with Tangle-Town. There was a lawsuit come up some forty odd years ago about the land the town is in, and the courts shut up everything, so nothing could be touched